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**WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS**  
Memphis Minnie

**LIMEHOUSE BLUES**  
Django Reinhardt

**RYLAND (UNDER  
THE APPLE TREE)**  
I'm With Her

3 SONGS

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**PLAY LIKE MEMPHIS MINNIE**

**GEAR REVIEWS** PRS SE TX20E & SE A50E | GENZLER ACOUSTIC ARRAY PRO

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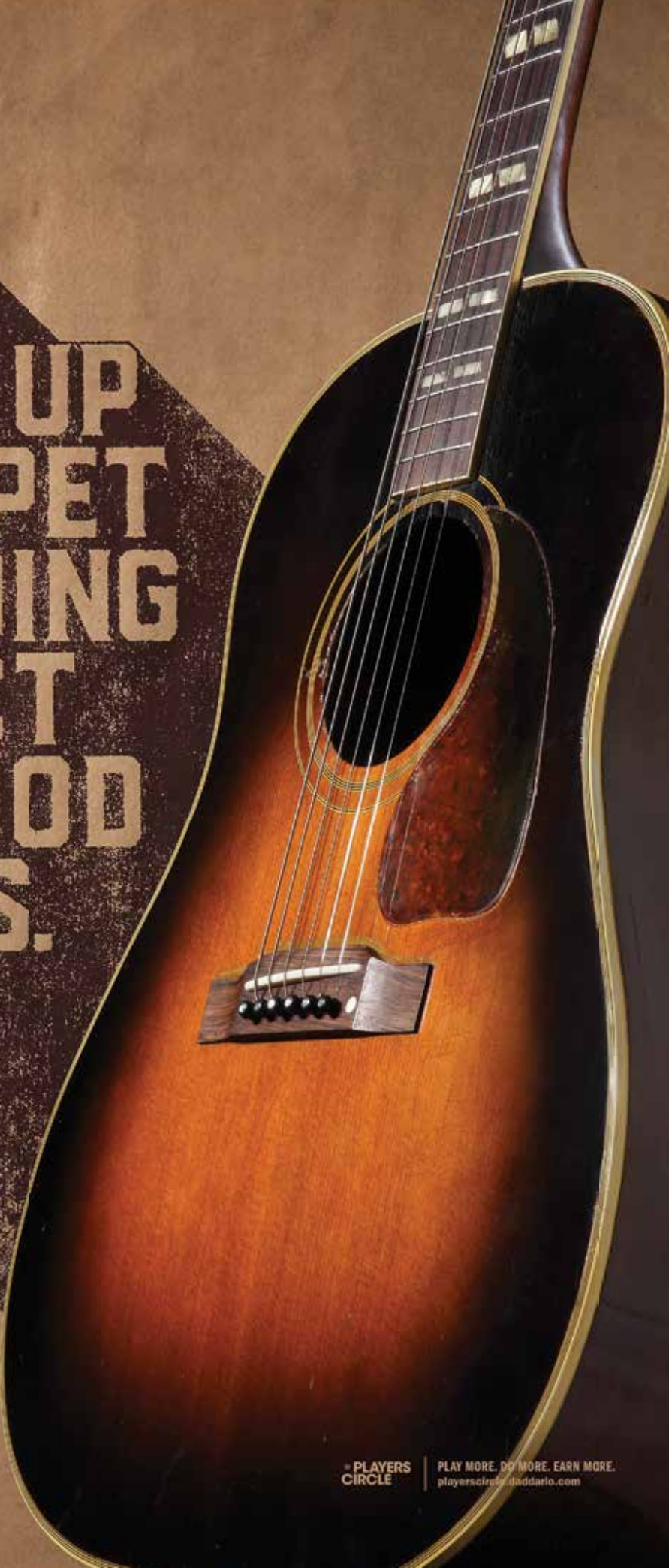




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**'I couldn't be any more ready to get onstage and play these songs. It's going to be really cool to take them on the road.'**

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**Photographer**

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1938 Martin 000-28 flattop



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Watch a demo of this innovative amp. (p. 76)

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COURTESY OF MAMIE MINCH

If this latest issue seems to have a Martin Guitars-plus-blues theme, I can tell you we didn't deliberately plan it that way! We started out focused on the lead article, "Guitar on a Budget," where you'll find a wealth of tips and advice from gigging artists, our own editors, and your fellow readers about making your musical dollars go as far as possible. Knowing how keen most *Acoustic Guitar* readers are about playing fingerstyle, we decided it was high time to revisit the basics in "The Care and Feeding of the Picking Hand," a concise overview by writer and guitarist Mac Randall. Our editor at large, Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, clues us into a powerful new band that extends familiar genres, as you'll learn in "The Power of 3." And gear reviewer Bill Leigh sets his sights on two new instruments from PRS' Asian-made line, while Pete Madsen takes the Genzler Acoustic Array Pro for a spin.

And it turns out there's plenty for the Martin fan, too. In "Bluegrass Rhythm King," Del McCoury recounts his lifelong love affair with the D-28. In "House of Guitars," vintage specialist Fred Oster takes us on a tour of his amazing collection, rich with Martins of many

periods. And this month's back-page Great Acoustic is, surprise, a 1938 Martin 000-28.

Blues enthusiasts may be forgiven for thinking this issue is all for them. Pete Madsen completes his 12-part series, "Play the Blues Like . . .," with a deep dive into the style of Memphis Minnie, including a full transcription of her rendering of "When the Levee Breaks," written by her husband, Joe McCoy, a tune later recomposed and popularized all over again by Led Zeppelin. (By the way, we'll be compiling all 12 of Pete's pieces into a single book and video collection later this year.) Adam Perlmutter's transcription of Django Reinhardt's solos on the jazz standard "Limehouse Blues" should keep you busy. But be forewarned, this is a blues in name only, consisting of 32 bars, not 12, in a unique and extended harmonic progression.

All told, I'd say this issue fairly reflects the wide-ranging mix of topics both familiar and unexpected that typically keep acoustic guitarists busy, engaged, and excited. That's just my opinion, of course, so please weigh in and let me know your own thoughts on the matter. I'm an email away and I'd love to hear from you.

—David A. Lusterman

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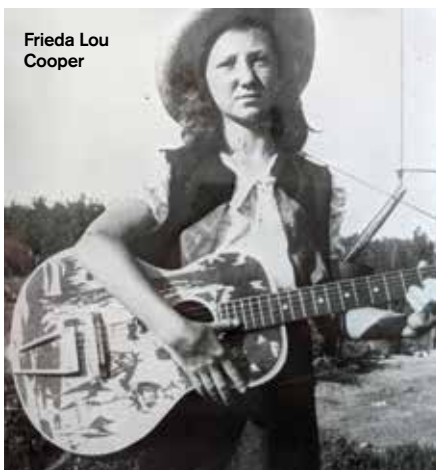
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Frieda Lou Cooper

### COWBOY QUEST

Thanks for reprinting the Cowboy Guitars article in the March issue. Over the past several years I've been trying to locate an original Plainsman guitar because that was the guitar that my mother, Frieda Lou Cooper, of Ewart, Michigan, first purchased circa 1939-'40. I've included a

photo of her standing in the yard of the old log home that she grew up in. At this time, she was 13-14 years old. I remember her telling me that she earned the money to purchase the guitar by helping her father do extra chores around the farm. If I remember correctly, it cost about \$13 from Montgomery Ward's catalog. I have fond memories of her playing the guitar and singing country-western ballads!

After years of searching, and my mother's passing in 2000, I located a Plainsman on Ebay for \$150. It was like striking gold. Now it is hanging on my wall along with her picture. To me, this find was precious and is a living reminder of the simple beauty of the guitars that paralleled the burgeoning country music environment of the Great Depression and the heart of cowboy lore.

—Joe D. Elenbaas, McBain, MI

### AFTER-HOURS TAX RELIEF

Great interview with Julian Lage in the April issue of AG. Thank you for the sweet description of Retrofret as well! Julian is just about

the only client I've ever let in the shop on a Sunday when we're normally closed. I happened to be at work when I noticed him on the CCTV standing around outside. He had been to the shop many times and fortunately I recognized him, so I invited him up. Turns out he had a few hours to kill before catching a train, so he hung out and played while I did accounting stuff. I've never had so much fun preparing data for my taxes!

Lage titled his song "233 Butler," which was on the *Gladwell* recording, after the shop address. After over 30 years here on Butler Street, we're moving the shop to a new (old) factory building close by. Perhaps Julian will compose another piece for the new address. Ha! —Steven Uhrik, Retrofret Vintage Guitars, Brooklyn, NY

### CORRECTION

In the April issue, on page 88, the performance notes for "New River Train" incorrectly state the D chord's third as D#. That note is in fact F#.



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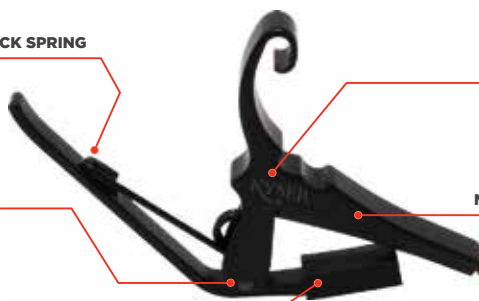
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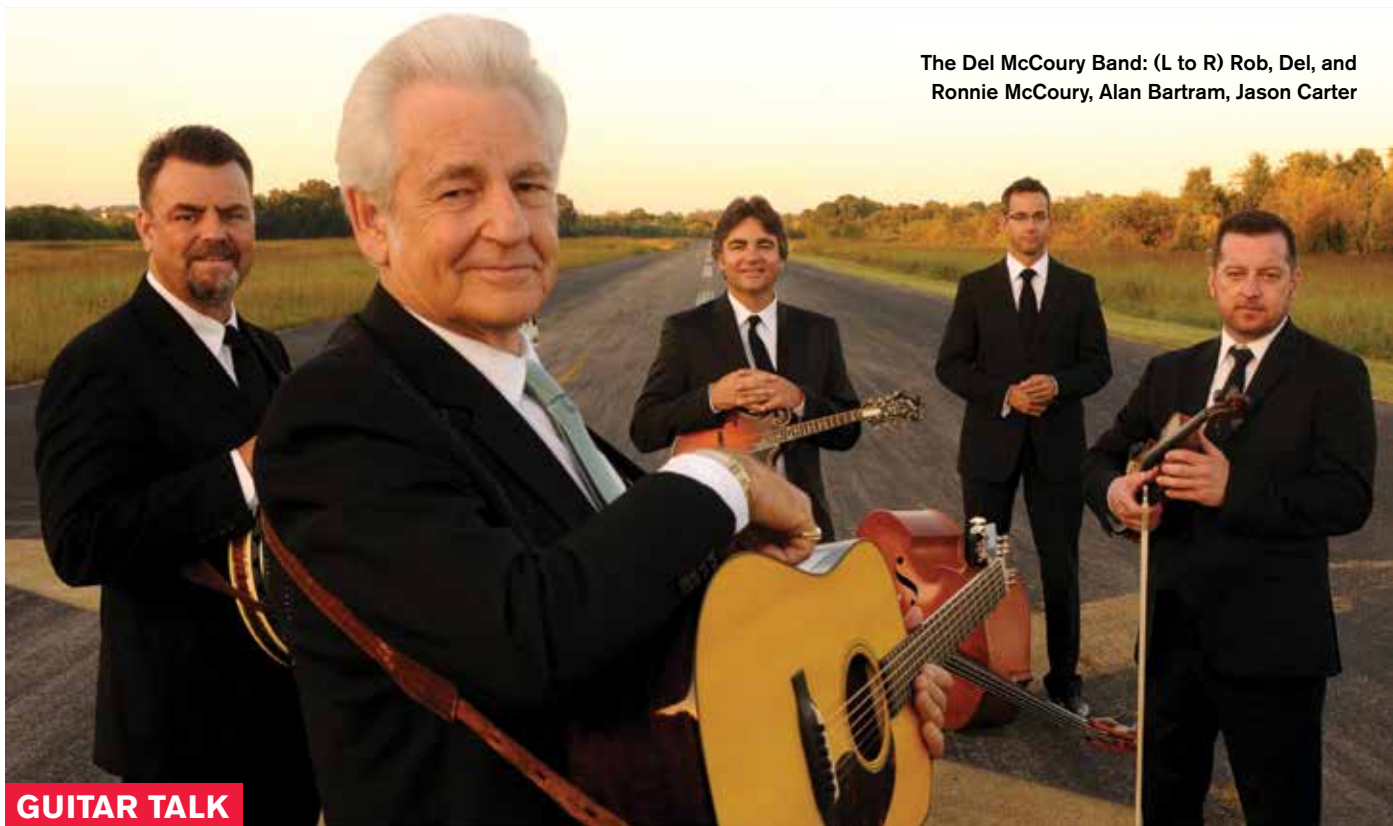




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The Del McCoury Band: (L to R) Rob, Del, and Ronnie McCoury, Alan Bartram, Jason Carter

GUITAR TALK

## Bluegrass Rhythm King

Del McCoury has found magic in old Martins for more than six decades

BY BLAIR JACKSON

When Del McCoury's tour bus rumbled into the parking lot of our offices on a crisp morning in late November 2017, the band members were still waking up after a sold-out two-show night at Berkeley's Freight & Salvage club the previous evening. Coffee was consumed in abundance and Del immediately announced that they would only be playing instrumentals for the group's Acoustic Guitar Sessions performance. "I don't think I can hit any high notes this morning," he said with chuckle. No problem! The band—Del (guitar), his sons Ronnie (mandolin) and Rob (banjo), Jason Carter (fiddle), and Alan Bartram (bass)—came alive the second the cameras started rolling, and they tore through a trio of uptempo bluegrass numbers with characteristic flash and skill.

These guys seem to be always on the road, or at the very least busy. Besides this group, the Del-less aggregation the Travelin' McCourys also gigs a fair amount. There are albums to be made—a new one from each is coming out in

May, one called *Del McCoury Still Sings Bluegrass*, the other *The Travelin' McCourys*. And then there is the annual multi-act extravaganza known as Del Fest, this year taking place May 24–27 in Cumberland, Maryland. Still, Del—at 79—shows no signs of slowing down, and he was happy to take a few minutes to talk about guitars, a bit of history, and his approach to playing in one of the finest bluegrass bands in the land.

**Tell us about that guitar you're playing today.**

I've played Martin guitars since 1956; I graduated high school in '57. This guitar here is a 1947 D-28 Martin. I've got a whole bunch of guitars actually, but most of them are Martins. Sometimes a guitar company will give me one to play, and I usually tell them, 'I appreciate this, but usually I play a Martin when I go onstage.' The one I played most I got in 1959 or '60, and it was a '56 Martin Model D-28. I played that on all the records I recorded all through the years until the early '90s. And then

I had a lot of other guitars: I had two 1936 D-18s, which are mahogany instead of rosewood, and they're great guitars—great for recording because they don't have as much "boom" in the low end as a D-28. But I still love playing a D-28 guitar. They respond better on the bass strings, and I like that.

**Can you talk a little about the role of the guitar in bluegrass? Traditionally, the musicians would probably be around one mic and that makes it a little harder for the guitar to cut through the fiddle and banjo and mandolin. How did you learn to adapt to that?**

I started playing guitar when I was nine; my brother J.C. was a guitar player and a singer and he taught me how to play chords. And when I was 11 I heard Earl Scruggs and thought, "That's what I've got to do—learn that banjo." So I did, and learned well enough to play in bands. Bill Monroe took me to New York City to play banjo with him, and he told





me later on, "I need a guitar player and a lead singer, and I want you to do that." [Laughs] Just like that! I don't know how he knew that I even played the guitar, but that's what he wanted. I never did go back to playing the banjo, which was my first love—to play the three-finger roll on the banjo.

From that time till now I've played guitar. And I learned a lot from Bill Monroe. Like you said, we'd play on one mic, and that's how we learned. Actually, we played a lot of dates without a microphone in those days, in the early '60s. I can remember playing dates in eastern Kentucky when we were tuning up onstage before the show—we didn't do a sound check

## **I started playing guitar when I was nine; my brother J.C. was a guitar player and a singer and he taught me how to play chords.**

because there was no "sound"—where Bill would say, "Now look, I'm going to put this match pack right there [on the floor in front of the middle of the group] and when it comes time for you to sing, you step right up there like that's your microphone. Same with the fiddle player. Step right up there. Then they know you're the lead person." But when we did play on a microphone he'd say, "Get in there and crowd me" because he needed that rhythm up there with him. So I learned to play hard rhythm. And about the only guitars that would hold up to that hard rhythm and not lose their tone were Martins.

I played behind a fiddle a lot at square dances in the early years, where you had to play all night long, a lot of closed chords or whatever, and that helped me a lot with my rhythm. When you're playing that much rhythm guitar you've got to learn how to use your wrist in the right way, and you'll do that if you play long enough. Because if you use your arm too much you can't last on a square dance. I learned that from Bill Monroe, too. He was the same way on that mandolin: It was all in his wrist; it was all right there.

### **You play the summer circuit of bluegrass festivals. Are there any young guitarists out there that you like?**

Actually, I haven't really paid attention to them like I should. I did years ago. I knew every guitar player, mandolin player, banjo player that was worth their salt; I knew their names. But as you get older . . . I just enjoy getting out onstage and entertaining people, talkin' to the audience. Actually, the audience will entertain me more than I entertain them—they're funny!

I got to know Doc Watson real early. I played out here in California with Bill Monroe in '63 at the Ash Grove in L.A., and Ralph Rinzler brought Doc out to open shows for Bill. That was the first time I met Doc and the first time Bill had ever seen Doc—his rhythm was really great, and he could play lead. Now, I can't play lead; I just never concentrated on it at all. I play runs, but Doc could play lead and then go right into playing a good solid rhythm. Tony Rice is the same way. There's really not that many who can do that. And I can only do half of it, and that's

the rhythm part. I can't play the lead part. I do love to hear lead guitar.

### **Do you find it difficult to maintain such a packed schedule?**

I used to love to play all night long at festivals and then get up and play a show the next day. But once you get past 70, you've got to watch those things. I did two 90-minute shows last night and I can feel it. I used to be able to get up out of bed and sing high tenor, but as the years go by all that changes. But I still love playing. And I love playing an old Martin gee-tar! **AG**

The advertisement features a black and white photo of Josh Baldwin, a bearded man in a light blue shirt, playing an acoustic guitar and singing into a microphone. In the top right corner is the 7TH logo (a red circle with a white 'G' and '7TH' inside) and the text 'The Capo Company'. In the bottom right corner is a silver Performance 2 capo with a yellow starburst graphic that says 'FREE LIFETIME WARRANTY'. A quote from Josh Baldwin is presented in a white-bordered box: 'I love my Performance 2 capo so much that I have one for each guitar! They are easy to use, very light, and look great. In my opinion it's the best capo out there!'. Below the quote is his name 'Josh Baldwin' and his title 'Songwriter and Worship Leader with Bethel Church and Bethel Music'. At the bottom left are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. At the bottom right is the text 'Find out more: [www.G7th.com/Performance2](http://www.G7th.com/Performance2)'.

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Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz,  
and Aoife O'Donovan





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**I**t's no surprise that I'm With Her, the young trio that just released its debut album *See You Around*, is a great-sounding band. After all, the group brings together the considerable talents of Aoife O'Donovan, who is the voice of the progressive string band Crooked Still and one of the most distinctive singers of her generation; Sara Watkins, who's been a force in the acoustic/bluegrass scene since forming Nickel Creek (with her brother Sean and Chris Thile) at age eight; and Sarah Jarosz, a two-time Grammy winner last year for Best Folk Album and American Roots Performance. All three are accomplished solo artists, songwriters, and multi-instrumentalists—O'Donovan on guitar and piano; Watkins on fiddle, ukulele, and guitar; Jarosz on octave mandolin, banjo, and guitar.

But what happens when these three musicians band together is something greater than a typical all-star project, where the members take turns in the spotlight. Right out of the gate, I'm With Her has a distinct and true collective voice—vocally, instrumentally, and in songwriting, with a sound and style that's tough to pigeonhole. The music has roots in folk and bluegrass, for sure, but its harmonic and melodic vocabulary draws on pop and jazz, too, and the nuanced arrangements show an attention to detail reminiscent of chamber music. The musicians are not acoustic purists either—on *See You Around*, electric guitar weaves in with the acoustic flattop, mando, fiddle, and other instruments in unusual ways. This is a band more interested in textures and layers of sound than in the orthodoxy of any particular genre.

In a conference call interview this winter from their respective homes—O'Donovan and Jarosz in Brooklyn, and Watkins in Los Angeles—the three musicians talked about how they came together as I'm With Her, and where they're headed.

### FINDING THE BLEND

The potential in combining their talents was apparent from the first time O'Donovan, Watkins, and Jarosz played together as a trio, during the Telluride Bluegrass festival in 2014. A last-minute invitation from the Punch Brothers prompted the three women—longtime friends and fellow travelers on the festival circuit—to throw together a set of bluegrass-oriented covers, like Ralph Stanley's "The Darkest Hour Is Just Before Dawn," Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky," and John Hartford's "Long Hot Summer Days," for a late-night set. Right off the bat, recalls Jarosz, "There was just an energy and a blend."

What's interesting about that blend is that the three women's voices and styles are quite distinct from each other—O'Donovan is silky



GENEVIE FRIDLEY

and understated, while Watkins has more of a blues/rock edge, and Jarosz taps into a smooth modern bluegrass sound. But in the band, these qualities merge into something new. "I wouldn't say that somebody brings the jazz and somebody brings the blues—it's not like that at all," says Watkins. "We all come from a culture of music where there's an emphasis on harmony as well as lead singing, so we've all grown up supporting other singers, which is really helpful. A huge thing that plays to our advantage is that we all have a big respect for each other's musicianship. We want to make it work and are excited about each other's contributions, and that's what makes it really fun."

In their initial tours, the trio focused mostly on covers, delivering luminous performances of tunes like John Hiatt's "Crossing Muddy Waters" and Nina Simone's "Be My Husband," the latter sung over only hand and foot percussion. But they soon resolved to take their collaboration to the next level by writing songs together. So in 2015, during two intensive retreats, they co-wrote the songs for their debut album. In the first session, in Los Angeles a year after connecting at Telluride, they spent four days completing song starts each brought, resulting in the title track of *See You Around* and more. Later that

year, sequestered away in a Vermont farmhouse for eight days, they began collaborating on songs from scratch, like the roots-rocking "I-89."

Co-writing presents a different sort of challenge than blending voices and instruments, but here, again, the three women felt immediately in sync. "The best thing about our vibe when writing is the ability to let go of any of our egos," says Jarosz. "If someone brings an idea to the table and it doesn't really resonate with all of us, then you just move on. Because we had such a limited amount of time in both of those writing sessions, that was crucial to being able to end up with a full album's worth of songs after just one four-day writing session and one eight-day writing session."

The compressed time frame also helped bridge their individual styles. "We were living together when we were in Vermont, so songwriting wasn't just limited to when we were sitting around with our instruments," says Watkins. "A lot of the conversations happened when we were making breakfast and just talking about something that came to mind or whether we should tweak this lyric. It was immersive in a way that made the songwriting and the contributions much less fragmented. Hopefully the lyrics and the arrangements feel



like one composite rather than a bunch of different pieces, because that was how the process of writing was.”

Listening to *See You Around*, it is often hard to guess the primary driver behind a particular song—and even the band members feel that way. “We did a thing last week where we sat in a room with a bunch of people and listened to the album, and we hadn’t done that in a while,” O’Donovan says. “I even sort of forgot whose ideas were what. The ownership of the music feels like ‘ours,’ as opposed to ‘That was my idea’ or ‘That was my lyric’ or ‘That was my start.’ I think that is a really cool thing to achieve in a band context.”

### MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

That blurring of contributions extends to the instrumental side. Aside from a handful of Weissenborn, harmonium, and keyboard parts by producer Ethan Johns, the trio played all the instruments on *See You Around*, and they continually swapped roles. Over the course of the album all three played both acoustic and electric guitar as well as other instruments—O’Donovan on piano and keyboards, Watkins on fiddle and uke, and Jarosz on clawhammer banjo and assorted mandos (mandolin, octave mandolin, mando-guitar). “It’s nice to vary the sonic palette,” says Jarosz, “to not all be on the same instrument for every song.”

The combination of sounds is a little different on each track. On the bouncy instrumental “Waitsfield,” named after the picturesque Vermont town near their second songwriting retreat, they fall into familiar string-band roles: Watkins plays the melody on fiddle, supported by Jarosz on mandolin, and O’Donovan adds bass lines and chords below on guitar. But on “Overland,” Jarosz’ clawhammer banjo carries the rhythm; and “I-89” opens with Watkins playing a slinky, fuzz-toned electric guitar line, then builds with flattop guitar and banjo—flipping the typical arrangement where acoustic instruments give way to electric crunch.

In arriving at an arrangement, says Jarosz, “A lot of the decisions are pretty clear when you’re writing the song, but it’s also nice to be open for changes in terms of what’s going to serve the song the best.” In the case of the haunting, elegiac “Pangaea,” Jarosz and O’Donovan sang as a duo during the writing process. In the album arrangement, though, Watkins takes over O’Donovan’s vocal part, and O’Donovan provides the core accompaniment on fingerstyle acoustic guitar, with only atmospheric touches of fiddle and electric guitar. Guiding these choices, says Jarosz, is “our awareness of creating the arc within each of the songs.”

Watkins elaborates on the point. “We’re basically trying to do as much as we can with three people, in terms of the instruments that are available to us and also our three voices, and trying to not have anything be redundant. If there’s a combination that’s happened a few times, we’re going to make sure that it doesn’t happen more than is necessary and maybe look into other options to make a sound we haven’t quite covered in this batch of songs.”

That approach means changing up vocal roles too, O’Donovan adds. “I think that something unique to this band is the fact that we don’t always do the same harmonic stack; at any

has recorded in both solo acoustic (on *World’s Fair*) and electric trio (on *Arclight*) versions. A few years ago while working with Lage on a project, O’Donovan heard him perform “Ryland” and immediately wanted to write lyrics—and she came up with the sweetly romantic “Under the Apple Tree.” O’Donovan performed it once with Lage on guitar and then, she recalls, “When I’m With Her was working in Vermont, we did a bunch of edits and changes and it became our version.”

Beyond that contribution from Lage, the only other song on *See You Around* that came from outside the band is “Hundred Miles,” which



given moment, each of us could be singing the high part or the low part or the melody. That does create a real variety of moods, depending on whose vocal timbre is coming through in the range that they’re in. I really appreciate that.”

### UNCOVERED

One unexpected highlight of *See You Around* is “Ryland (Under the Apple Tree),” which sounds like a newly discovered gem from the Tin Pan Alley era (see transcription, page 24). Jazz guitar fans may recognize the music as the Julian Lage instrumental “Ryland,” which he

Watkins discovered in a collection of Gillian Welch songs that Welch had not recorded. “To me that was a standout in a way that I could imagine singing it,” Watkins recalls. “I performed it a couple of times but never really found a way to do it that felt like I wasn’t just covering a Gillian Welch song—it was hard to imagine in a way that wouldn’t be a Gill and Dave [Rawlings] treatment. So I just played it for fun.”

When I’m With Her was in the studio, though, something clicked with “Hundred Miles”—with a minimalist arrangement that’s a cappella until nearly halfway through.

## I'M WITH HER

"Somehow we just stumbled into this other way of approaching it that felt much more appropriate to our record and to our band," says Watkins. "I think it was the last song that we recorded. It was late at night, and the take [on the record] is actually the first take."

### KEEPING IT LIVE

Although *See You Around* was just released by Rounder in February, I'm With Her actually recorded the album two years before, when many of the songs were freshly written. The long lag is a result of their busy individual careers—this year, their other projects cleared out enough that they could devote themselves to extensive I'm With Her touring of North America and Europe.

The process of making the album was a learning experience for the band. When they flew over to England for the sessions, Jarosz and O'Donovan had never met producer Ethan Johns in person—they'd only chatted once over Skype. And they didn't fully realize that Johns wanted them to record in an old-school way that very few musicians use these days: laying down the songs live—vocals and instruments—in the same room, facing each other with no isolation and no headphones.

Initially, Jarosz recalls, "We would literally play a song once, when all of us were thinking

we were warming up, and he would be like, 'That was it.' [laughs] I think he had to get to know us better to know, OK, we want to not have these be so raw, because we work on the intricacies and we want those to come through on the recording as well."

This approach of capturing complete performances, rather than piecing together isolated and overdubbed tracks, pays off beautifully on *See You Around*. As anyone can attest who's heard I'm With Her live—playing around one microphone in last year's American Acoustic tour, for instance—this is definitely *not* a band in need of pitch correction and editing to sound in-tune and in-time. Still, even for musicians and singers of this caliber, the straight live approach was an adjustment.

"Once I got over the intimidation of screwing up someone's perfect take," Watkins recalls, "it was good, for me anyway, to just play to each other and not worry about hearing things in headphones, which sometimes makes me focus more on my own mistakes and takes me out of the performance. My studio playing can suffer because of that. I really enjoyed getting to a comfortable place with this setup. It made it much more like normal music-playing rather than studio."

### AROUND THE BEND

After the long wait to release *See You Around*, O'Donovan says, "I couldn't be any more ready to get onstage and play these songs. It's going to be really cool to take them on the road." While their touring in 2017 was straight acoustic, often around one mic, the album-release shows feature "a fuller sonic landscape, more similar to what's on the record." She adds, "I think having that flexibility is unique to this band. You could play the songs with one acoustic guitar—they don't necessarily need all the other instruments. It's nice to be able to build them up or take them down."

Meanwhile, as I'm With Her continues to blossom, all three members will move forward with solo projects and other collaborations. The fact that all their eggs are not in the basket of this one project is, they agree, a strength.

"I think it's crucial to have a variety of outlets," says Watkins. "One of the things that's so beautiful and joyful about this band is we can drop some of our ego. If something doesn't work for this band, it can go somewhere else. If I present a song idea that nobody's excited about, I can take that and put it on a solo record in a couple of years if I still like it. There's a freedom in knowing this isn't the only way for us to express ourselves." **AG**



## WHAT I'M WITH HER PLAYS

Here are the instruments played by the band on *See You Around*:

### Sarah Jarosz

Collings MF5 mandolin  
Fletcher Brock octave mandolin  
Bernard Mollberg Burnin' Sun six-string clawhammer banjo  
1952 Gibson ES-140  
Ethan Johns' Gretsch White Falcon electric

### Aoife O'Donovan

Collings O  
Martin 1934 0-17  
Piano, synth keys

### Sara Watkins

Fiddle—English instrument circa early 1900s  
Andy Powers custom ukulele  
1952 Gibson ES-140  
Ethan Johns' Airline electric

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# Ryland (Under the Apple Tree)

I'm With Her's sweet, fresh take on a Julian Lage instrumental

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It was the summer 2015 concert series offered by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and Aoife O'Donovan was working with a string quintet that included guitarist Julian Lage. The ensemble was rehearsing Lage's composition "Ryland" when it struck O'Donovan that the melody was quite singable.

"I scribbled down some lyrics, and we performed it that weekend," O'Donovan says. "When I brought it to I'm With Her, we rewrote and reorganized it to suit our band. Julian has such a gift for melody—he's the most melodic guitar player I know—so many

of his songs feel like forgotten stories with lyrics unwritten."

On his solo guitar album *World's Fair*, Lage plays "Ryland" in the key of E major, his acoustic guitar tuned down a whole step, so that the music sounds in D. With I'm With Her, O'Donovan plays the song in standard tuning in E, on the electric guitar (incidentally, a Gibson ES-140, a 3/4-size hollowbody, belonging to Sara Watkins).

The chords on the I'm With Her version are somewhat less complex than in the original piece. O'Donovan says she streamlined the harmonies because she takes the piece at a faster

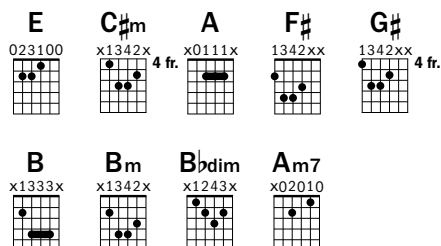
tempo than Lage, and because she's a little less comfortable on the electric guitar than the acoustic. The ringing arpeggios that she plays sound just as good on the acoustic, though.

To learn the piece, first familiarize yourself with the nine chord grips shown here in the notation. Then, take the E chord and try the 6/8 arpeggio pattern—that's six eighth notes per bar—either fingerstyle or with a pick. Keep the chord held and pick the notes gently and evenly, using whatever fingers or pick strokes feel most comfortable; do the same when you extend the pattern to the remaining chords in the progression. **AC**

## RYLAND (UNDER THE APPLE TREE)

WRITTEN BY JULIAN LAGE, SARA WATKINS, SARAH JAROSZ, AOIFE O'DONOVAN

### Chords



### Accompaniment Pattern



### Verse

1. Bright hand  
2. Instrumental

sum - mer - time. \_\_\_\_\_ Pour the wine; \_\_\_\_\_  
up - on my breast \_\_\_\_\_ in my sun -

we've got time. \_\_\_\_\_ I'll make you mine \_\_\_\_\_  
you steal a kiss. \_\_\_\_\_ How sweet it is \_\_\_\_\_

un - der the ap - ple tree I

\*Cue-size notes in bars 10-15  
sung second time only.





13 **E** **C#m** **B** **E** **1** **2**

plant - ed for my love and me. 2. Your Come Sep -

**Bridge**

18 **Bm** **A** **E**

tem - ber we'll be swim - ming in cid - er. And we'll

22 **Bm** **B<sup>b</sup>dim** **Am7**

press the fruit in - to but - ter, and we'll bake it in - to

**Verse**

26 **E** **C#m**

pies. Oh me, oh my. I love you

30 **A** **F#**

like a but - ter - fly. Just let me

34 **E** **G#** **A** **F#**

lie un - der the ap - ple tree I

**To Coda** **D.C. al Coda (take 2nd ending)**

38 **E** **C#m** **B** **E**

plant - ed for my love and me.

**Coda**

42 **C#m** **B** **E** **C#m** **B** **E**

I plant - ed for my love and me.

# The Care and Feeding of the Picking Hand







## One musician's evolution as a fingerstyle player offers good insight for the steel-string guitarist

BY MAC RANDALL

**W**hen I started playing guitar at age nine, many years ago, I felt far more comfortable using a flatpick than picking with my fingers. My first teacher specialized in bluegrass, and he showed me the basics of fingerstyle. But when I was playing on my own and push came to shove, I tended to stick with the pick. Fingerstyle was too complicated; too many moving body parts. If a pick wasn't handy, I'd fake one by putting the tips of my right-hand thumb and index finger together, and catching the edge of the strings with the nail of my index finger. Prolonged bouts of this particular activity would turn the fingertip black. They also likely had something to do with why my right index

fingernail is considerably and, it would now seem, permanently thinner than any other nail on either of my hands.

However, neither of those peculiarities account for why I eventually got serious about fingerstyle. It came down to circulation trouble. In my late teens, I practiced every day for several hours at a time. While I was playing, I would often lose feeling in the third and fourth fingers on my right hand. Sensation would gradually return, sometimes after a brief pins-and-needles period, once I took my arm off the guitar. Clearly, the way I positioned my arm was cutting off the blood flow to those fingers and turning them into dead weight. But try as I might, I couldn't figure

out a way to stop this from happening and still hold the guitar comfortably.

Then, after months of experimentation, it finally hit me: Maybe I should try *using* my third and fourth fingers instead of just leaving them to go numb. So I grew my nails and started working on my fingerstyle chops in earnest. As I'd hoped, my fingers stopped falling asleep—and they've never done so again. Throughout the decades that have followed, I've kept my right-hand nails long, which sometimes prompts people to make comments along the lines of "Are you sure you're not part werewolf?" I'll gladly take such occasional ribbing, though, in exchange for having all my fingers work properly.

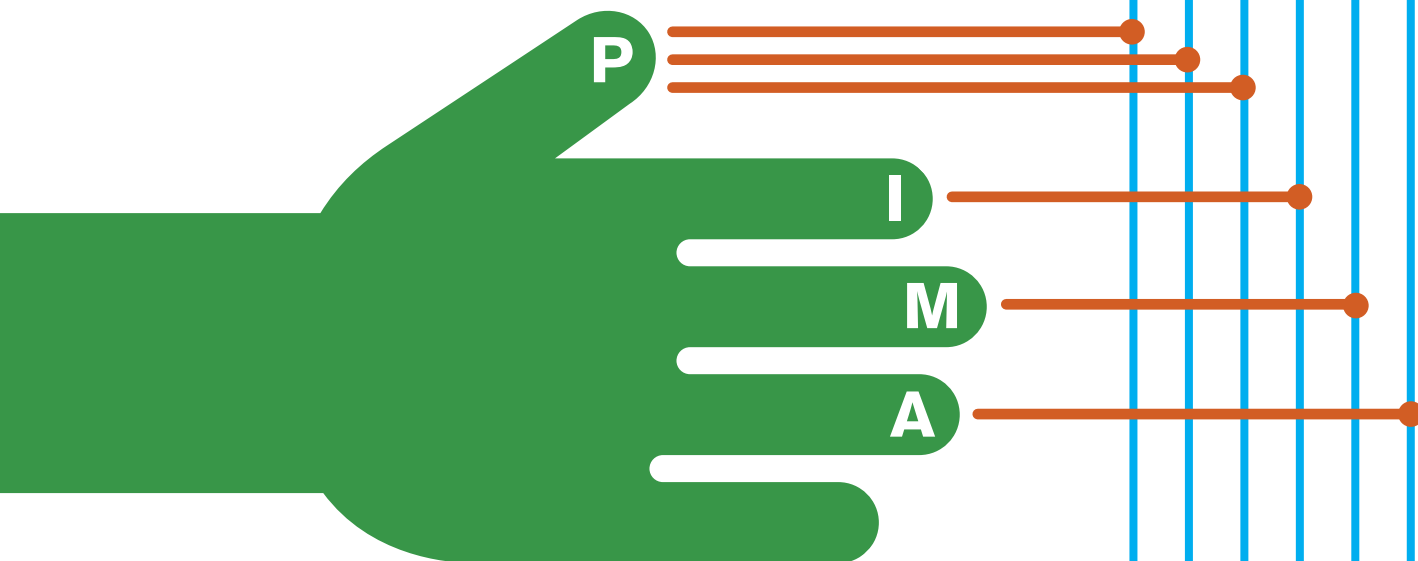
## THE PICKING HAND

**A**lthough I adopted fingerpicking out of personal necessity, I soon began to notice its other attractions, both technical and aesthetic. When you play with a flatpick alone, your picking hand doesn't have as much direct contact with the strings; go fingerstyle and you cut out the middleman. You also gain the ability to execute more complex patterns, and to play separate strings at exactly the same time—impossible with a pick. Then there's the tone factor: Playing with your fingers just plain sounds different from playing with a pick, in much the same way that a plucked harp sounds different from a strummed dulcimer or zither. And, of course, fingerpicking allows you to replicate more convincingly the styles of myriad great guitarists

using just the flesh on your fingertips. Feeling those strings dig into your skin may not be all that comfortable at first, but over time you'll develop calluses just as tough as the ones on your fretting hand. Still, growing your nails, even a little, gives you more options. Picking a string with only the nail produces a sharper attack, while adding a pinch of flesh puts more body behind that attack. And one of the nicest things about fingerpicking is that you can change the ratio of nail to flesh for each finger by simply raising or lowering that finger a tad, giving each separate string the potential to have a slightly different articulation and tone.

Of course, if you're going to grow your nails, you've got to take care of them, because there's

6 5 4 3 2 1



of the past and present, from Andrés Segovia to Steve Howe to Joan Baez to Taj Mahal.

Before you can reach that point, though, you have to get comfortable with the basics. You quickly realize that simple things—subtle changes in the position of your arm and hand, or an alteration in the balance you strike between nail and flesh—can make major differences, and that more complicated things—like acquiring the muscle memory you need to get your fingers working independently with consistency—can take a long time to achieve.

### FLESH, NAIL, OR BOTH?

Let's say you're interested in playing fingerstyle but you'd rather avoid the werewolf jokes. No problem; you can get by (and sound splendid)

only one thing worse for a fingerstyle guitarist than breaking a nail just before a gig: breaking it *during* a gig. To avoid such problems, many players often apply Super Glue or a similar hard-drying adhesive to their nails, while others will use that adhesive to attach pre-shaped plastic “player’s nails.” Pierre Bensusan’s favored solution, described in his *The Guitar Book*, is a combo of Krazy Glue and baking soda. Some players, like Latin jazz/pop artist Raúl Midón, make regular trips to the manicurist. “I used to do acrylic nail polish on three of my picking-hand fingers,” Midón told me recently, “but now I do gel. It’s even stronger than acrylic, and it doesn’t have that toxic smell that you get sometimes when you go into a nail salon. Usually it holds up for two or three weeks.”

Cont. on p. 30



### Example 1

C Am F G

p i m a etc.

### Example 2

C Am F G

p a m i etc.

### Example 3

C Am F G

p m i a etc.

### Example 4

C Am F G

p m a i etc.

### Example 5

C Am F G

a p p i p m p etc.

## FIVE CORE FINGERSTYLE PATTERNS

Learning how to pick fingerstyle can be frustrating at first. To make things easier, each of the following patterns employs the same classic I-vi-IV-V chord progression, C-Am-F-G, in first position and common time. In each pattern, the thumb (*p*) is the first thing you hear in every measure. It handles the quarter-note beats (1, 2, 3, and 4) while the first (*i*), middle (*m*), and third (*a*) fingers play the 16th notes in between (ee-and-ah).

The trick with the first four examples is getting comfortable with the way the three fingers alternate. In **Examples 1 and 2**, they move in a straight line, first forward (*i-m-a*) and then in reverse (*a-m-i*). **Examples 3 and 4** change things up by putting *m* before *i*; Ex. 4 (*m-a-i*) feels more counterintuitive than Ex. 3 (*m-i-a*), but that could just be a personal issue on my part. There are plenty more combinations that you can try using this basic pattern—for example, put *a* in the spot where *m* just was and see what happens.

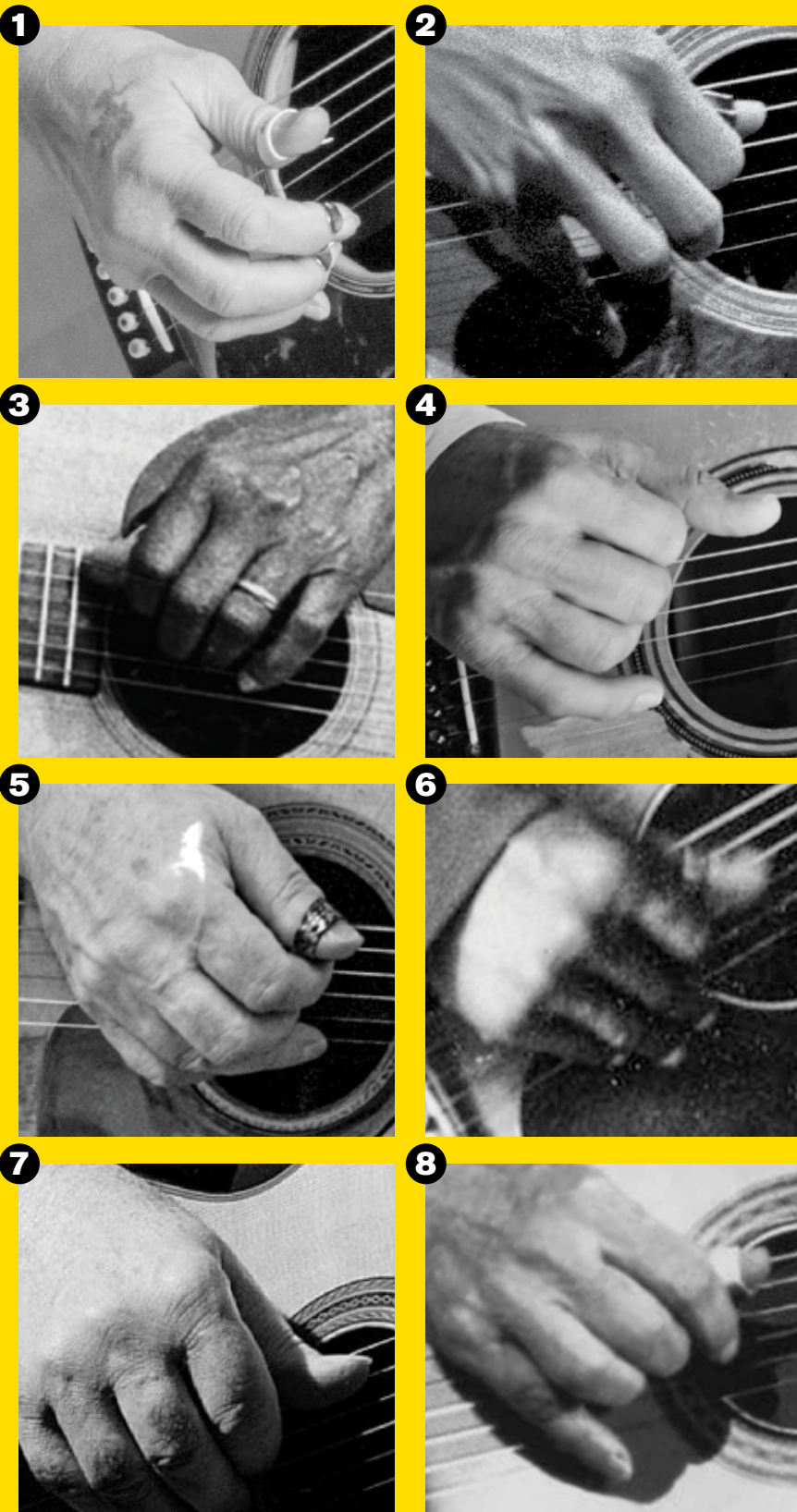
For **Example 5**, things get a bit more complicated. This is an example of clawhammer-style picking that introduces the element of syncopation. As before, *p* keeps time by picking out straight quarter notes, but *a* plays simultaneously with *p* on the first beat of the measure, while *i* and *m* fall on off beats (the “ands” of 2 and 3). You can hear similar patterns in countless folk and rock songs, perhaps most notably the Beatles’ “Julia.”

# PICK THE PICKER

Think you have the “digital” knowledge to guess all eight? Correctly identify the following famous finger pickers and win a prize!

**Tommy Emmanuel, Jorma Kaukonen, Andrés Segovia, Chet Atkins, Bert Jansch, Joan Baez, Reverend Gary Davis, and Elizabeth Cotten**

Enter online at: [research.net/r/pickinghand](https://research.net/r/pickinghand)



Cont. from p. 28

**T**o keep your nails intact, it helps to keep them well-shaped, i.e., rounded to follow the fingertip's natural curve, with no nasty sharp edges. Midón uses six different files on his nails, each one a different thickness. “You’ve got to remember to file underneath the nails as well as along the edges,” he advises. “Otherwise, if you have a burr underneath, it’s going to get caught on a string or it’s going to make an undesirable noise.” An additional option, and one that a lot of guitarists (particularly classical players) swear by, is buffing the edges of the nails with sandpaper.

## PRIME POSITION

When you pick a string with a flatpick, you usually hold it pretty much parallel to the string. Although it’s possible to do the same thing with your fingers, I wouldn’t recommend it. To pick a string head-on with the edge of a fingernail, you have to move your forearm back and scrunch up your shoulder in a way that doesn’t promote comfort over time. It’s much easier, and more sustainable, to keep your fingers at an angle to the strings. When they’re at rest, they should form a roughly diagonal line, with the thumb closest to the neck and the little finger closest to the bridge.

**To keep your nails intact, it helps to keep them well-shaped, i.e., rounded to follow the fingertip’s natural curve, with no nasty sharp edges.**

Unless you want to engage in some Merle Travis-style country picking and dampen bass notes with the palm of your hand, it’s best to keep everything except your fingertips and nails off the strings. Your four fingers should arch upward from their tips, and you’ll find that your arm’s center of gravity will move a little further up its underside than it generally does when you play with a pick, closer to the crook of the elbow. This change in arm position doesn’t need to be big—for most players, it’s only fractions of an inch, something that few observers would ever notice—but it helps orient the hand more securely for picking rather than strumming.

## DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The biggest challenge of fingerstyle playing is getting your picking-hand fingers used to working independently. For beginners, the time-honored method of doing this is to assign each finger to a string and keep it there, with



no deviation; that way there's less chance of you getting confused. This method is time-honored because it works, and so I've used it for all five examples in the sidebar on page 29. To make the most of the examples, you'll need to get acquainted with my old friend Pima, a.k.a. *p-i-m-a*, the standard system of symbols for the picking hand: *p* stands for the thumb, *i* is the index finger, *m* is the middle finger, and *a* is the third (ring) finger.

As seen in the sidebar, the most common approach in fingerstyle is to assign *i* to the guitar's third string, *m* to the second string, and *a* to the first string, leaving *p* to float between the fourth, fifth, and sixth strings. Since this forms the basis for most blues, country, folk, and even classical picking patterns, odds are that you can successfully apply it to whatever type of playing you care to do. That doesn't mean you need to be tied down to it; once you've gotten used to fingerstyle playing and your fingers are doing what you want when you want without your having to think about it all the time, try assigning your fingers to different strings or mixing

them up randomly. I have to confess that when I play fingerstyle now, I'm not always aware of which finger is doing what. But that's a good thing—as guitarists, we aim to reach the point where our conscious minds can be left behind and we're playing *music* rather than just playing our instrument.

#### SOLVING THE PINKY PROBLEM

You might have noticed that the *p-i-m-a* system leaves something out: the pinky. That's because in most classical and popular styles of finger-picking, the little finger has no function other than to hang in space—or rest on the guitar's top as an anchor—while the other fingers do all the work. Frankly, this makes sense; after all, that finger is so much shorter than its brethren that incorporating it can be impractical. But when I was in my teens and trying to solve my picking-hand circulation problem, I found this state of affairs unacceptable. If you're going to play with your fingers, I reasoned, you need to play with *all* your fingers. And so I grew my picking-hand pinky nail to lengths that often

bordered on the absurd and tried to work finger number four into my patterns.

The most successful approach I found—and one that you may wish to try, too—was to turn the fourth finger into *a* and assign it to the first string. The third finger thus became *m*, the middle finger became *i*, and the index finger, now planted by the fourth string, took up some of the duties previously handled by the thumb. I must be honest here and note that I haven't always been able to do this consistently. (I've gotten better results over time with a hybrid-picking approach, in which the pick, held between thumb and index finger in the usual manner, becomes *p* and the remaining three fingers are *i*, *m*, and *a*.) Also, I've learned from harsh experience that assigning the pinky to any string below the first is unlikely to yield positive results; it requires too much contortion of the hand.

Still, my various fingerstyle experiments have allowed me to incorporate the pinky into my playing enough that it at least pulls its own weight now. Which is a lot better than falling asleep on the job. **AC**

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# guitar on a budget

**pros offer advice on getting the most out of your gear, so you can play and sound your best**

**E**ven if you're the kind of guitar-obsessed nut who spends hours cruising reverb.com or your favorite online guitar shops for your dream guitar(s) when you really should be sleeping, the stark reality is that when it comes down to it, most guitarists need to make cost-conscious buying decisions. The realities of balancing family needs, repairing that car you need to last another year, or paying off crushing student-loan debts force many guitarists to tap the brakes before spending and come up with ways to squeeze the most out of their money and their equipment.

Just because you may be aware of your budgetary limits doesn't mean you have to suffer, however. For help, we turned to a few of our trusted contributors for advice on getting the best guitar-playing experience without necessarily spending a lot of money. Our one guideline was that "budget" doesn't have to mean selecting the cheapest option. Often, spending a little more on a higher-quality item pays off in both the short term and the long run. With some of the tips included here, you might find a few ways to get a good price on your latest gear crush, give new life to an old guitar, or discover small, low-cost hacks that will make your life as a guitar player just a little bit sweeter.

## SHOPPING

While luscious photos and countless websites offer hours of window-shopping for guitars and gear, it's almost dangerously easy to buy a guitar online that you've never played. But a few of our experts agree that it's important to know what you want before you buy. How do you really know? Play as many guitars as possible before you make your purchase, suggests Paul Mehling of the Hot Club of San Francisco. He warns that you may have to "kiss a lot of frogs before you find your Prince Charming," but it's a fun process and a huge education for any player. "Play a ton of instruments and get to know what you like in a guitar—its feel, its tone, its vibe," adds Mehling.

Contributing Editor Adam Perlmutter suggests that after you zero in on the right guitar for you, use sites like reverb.com and eBay to do lots of comparison shopping. He also cautions that you should make sure the seller has a good return policy, especially if you're buying a used guitar.

Many of our respondents also agreed that you often end up getting what you pay for. "As with anything, quality trumps price," says Pauline France, a regular AG contributor.

BY GREG OLWELL

PHOTOS BY DORAN SHELLEY

“Would you rather have to replace a cheap instrument frequently, or invest in a high-quality instrument that will last you a lifetime?”

Whether it's a guitar or an outboard piece of gear, another theme that kept popping up from our panel was to avoid the bells and whistles and focus on the quality of tone. For example, when it comes to choosing amps, guitarist, author, and educator Pete Madsen recommends that players build an amplification rig with no frills and instead focus on getting a good sound. “I’ve usually found onboard effects either suffer in quality or don’t have enough control parameters to dial in the sound I want,” he says, suggesting that instead, players should, “Find a pedal [reverb, delay, etc.] that you really like and go with that,” after selecting an amp or PA for its tone, not for its spec list.

Madsen also suggests that if you already have a guitar that’s precious to you and you plan on gigging often, it might be worth budgeting for a less-valuable guitar outfitted with a good pickup system. “The overall tone of the instrument could be sacrificed in favor of the feel,” he suggests, adding, “I’d choose a guitar that’s as close as possible to having the same appointments as my prized guitar, like body size, scale length, neck feel, nut width, and string spacing.”

## WORK WITH WHAT YOU’VE GOT

Many little things can extend the life, boost playability, and even get more tone out of your trusty guitar. And with several of these tips, not only are you saving money (or not spending it in the first place), you’re being a more attentive caretaker of a guitar that might outlast you.

Onboard your guitar, Madsen recommends swapping out plastic parts like bridge pins, nuts, and saddles for bone. Plastic works well for these essential parts, but you might be surprised at the gains you’ll pick up with each component change. With each upgrade, you can expect more clarity, sustain, and snap once you shed plastic for organic materials.

When heading out to gigs or rehearsals, teacher, singer-songwriter, and first-call guitarist Adam Levy recommends storing picks and capos in a small container—like an Altoids tin—instead of in your pockets. Besides not having to fish around for them, he says, “You’re much less likely to lose picks and capos if you have a dedicated place for them, where you pack them at the end of each gig, rehearsal, or practice session.” At home, it can be a good idea to keep picks, slides, and capos in a bowl near your favorite playing spot. It keeps them tidy and in an easy-to-reach place.

Depending on the acids and oils in your sweat, this next tip might be essential for extending the life of your strings or even your

guitar. “I wipe my strings down every time I put the guitar down between sets on gigs or after each practice session in the woodshed,” says Mehling. “I used to use rubbing alcohol and a soft cloth, but now I use John Pearse String Swipes.” Regularly wiping down your guitar with a soft, lint-free cloth, like a microfiber or an old t-shirt, can also help keep it clean and the finish healthy for a long time.

## CARE AND MAINTENANCE

“Get your guitar professionally set up once per year—just like you go to the doctor for your annual checkup,” says Adam Levy. Doing so will help you get to know how your guitar plays and sounds when it’s at its best—and you’ll know if your guitar is performing below its peak potential. These regular visits are also a great time for a tech to catch any developing problems.



Mehling adds that though a DIY approach can be good, a professional setup is often worth the effort and expense. “For many years, I tried to change my oil and sparkplugs in my cars before it became obvious that the money I *thought* I was saving was better spent on someone who could do it right in a shorter amount of time. The lesson is: Get a good repairer and trust them.” Finding a good local tech can be as easy as asking around. Many of our respondents said that the best way to find a good local tech is through word of mouth. Ask around and find out who is good and who to avoid.

Though a pro setup and regular checkups can help keep your guitar performing at its best, there are still basic care and maintenance skills that every guitar player should learn. A few of the teachers we spoke with revealed that a surprising number of students (young and old) do not know how to change their strings. Madsen suggests asking for help if you’re in doubt. “Maybe the first time you change your strings you could have a salesman

or repair tech help you, but paying someone to change your strings is a waste.”

Changing strings is also a great time to keep your guitar’s fingerboard in its best shape. D’Addario, Dunlop, Ernie Ball, and other companies sell fingerboard-cleaning kits that help remove gunk, clean frets, and condition your fingerboard. You can also do it yourself using 0000-grade (extra-fine) steel wool and a quality oil such as mineral oil or lemon oil (which is mineral oil scented with lemon) to wipe down the fingerboard along the length of the neck. You probably won’t need to do this step more than once a year, so don’t overdo it.

Learning how to keep your guitar properly humidified is essential, especially if you have a solid wood guitar, which is more vulnerable to relative humidity changes than plywood (or layered) guitars. A guitar kept in an environment that is around 40 to 60 percent relative humidity will not only sound its best, it will help keep cracks from forming or glue seams from separating.

## WHAT’S NON-NEGOTIABLE?

While we’ve looked at several ways to save a buck or extend the life of an instrument or component, some of our panel members have non-negotiable expenses. For the folks who responded, these pieces of equipment are often the ones that help them perform with the most confidence and control.

Though your personal ideal tone is subjective, if you plan on gigging often, a few of our panel members suggest spending money on the sound reinforcement pieces that *you* like to hear. After using acoustic guitar amps that worked well, but didn’t please his ears, Madsen realized, “it’s worthwhile to get a good amp that gives me a sound that really makes me want to play. After all, over a three-hour gig people will come and go, but I have to listen to myself for the whole time!”

Consider what your needs really are going to be and dedicate some of your budget to getting the best piece of gear for where you truly see yourself playing. For instance, if you’re a singer-songwriter who plays coffeehouses, Perlmutter suggests that getting the best amplification and a decent case is more important than an all-solid wood guitar. But, if you plan on recording in a studio, he offers that spending money on “the very best acoustic you can find, but skimp on the ornaments,” is a prudent approach.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, several of these gig-saving, musical security blankets are also some of the cheapest. For Mehling, the things he actually has his fingertips on while playing are essential. “Good strings will make any guitar sound better,” he says, adding that a



good, stiff pick will make any guitar sound better and “like I had already plugged it in.”

Levy suggests that “dressing for the job you want” helps you feel your best onstage, and adds, “Invest in a strap you love. A great strap is more comfortable and helps you look and feel like a real pro.”

#### PROTECTION & INSURANCE

Though it may be one of the least exciting parts of playing guitar, keeping your equipment safe is an essential part of being a caretaker for your treasured instrument. With tons of regular gigs, Levy strongly recommends a high-quality gig bag or case for keeping your guitar safe for local and long-distance travel. “A \$180 gig bag might seem like a lot of money if your guitar costs, say, \$500,” but if you’re gigging often, it’s worth the extra money to properly protect your instrument.

In the event that something awful happens, an insurance plan can help to soften the blow of losing an instrument to theft, accidents, or reckless baggage handlers. If your instrument and gear stash is valued at \$2,000 or more, it may be



You can keep your fingerboard in shape with 0000-grade (extra-fine) steel wool and lemon oil.

worthwhile to have your guitar insured. While many homeowner’s and renter’s insurance policies can help guitarists needing coverage, some insurance companies such as Clarion and Heritage offer special plans for musical instruments and may be a wise and safe choice for protecting your investment. The insurance company websites can offer you more information about what may be the best option for you. **AC**

## further resources

To learn more, search some of these topics at [AcousticGuitar.com](http://AcousticGuitar.com)

Ask the Expert: How to Cure Your Guitar’s Wintertime Humidity Blues

How to Shop for a Used Guitar

Same Guitar, New Sounds: A Guide to Strings

Fingerboard Maintenance

Cleaning Your Fingerboard

DIY Maintenance: How to Keep Your Guitar Clean

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# readers respond

**I**f there's one thing we've learned over the years, it's that *AG* readers are passionate about their gear. That fact was once again driven home when more than 1,300 of your fellow readers responded to our online 'Guitar on a Budget' survey. We asked respondents to share their money-saving tips, stories about their favorite gear acquisitions, what items they value most, what they're willing to spend a little more on, what they would replace first in case of loss, as well as other strategies for getting the most bang for their musical buck. Here are some of their answers, ideas, and recommendations.

## WHAT ONE PIECE OF EQUIPMENT DO YOU OWN THAT FEELS LIKE A GREAT BUY?

My first acoustic: Ibanez Jampack, solid spruce top, mahogany body. Stays in tune forever, easy to play, and only cost \$149! Would not part with it. —*tonypadilla54*

My carbon-fiber guitars (RainSong, Composite Acoustics). They do well in dry winter heat so I don't have to worry about them. —*anon*

Fishman Loudbox Mini amp. It came as a combo with a mic, mic stand, and mic cable. Great purchase for solo/small group gigs! —*williamstonepadgett*

My Seagull Artist Series Studio CW with Quantum 2 electronics. It is solid spruce and rosewood, sounds amazing both acoustically and electrified, and almost always gets complimented by the sound guys. When I bought it, it

**Seagull Artist Series  
Studio CW**



beat out some \$3,000 guitars that I tried. It's not only a great guitar for the money, it's a great guitar! —*Dpswithrow*

I bought a very well-made footrest from John Stass at Katahdin Woodworks in Maine about 25 years ago. I felt it was expensive at the time, but I can't think of playing without it now. It has aged beautifully with all the corners and edges worn smooth, and the once pale wood is now a golden red. We are aging together. —*cmr322*

BigRock Power Pins 2.0 are a great inexpensive mod to a cheap acoustic guitar. I have a beginner's Yamaha that had plastic bridge pins. Years of changing strings had started to eat away the wood on the underside of the bridge. Power Pins 2.0 remedied that situation. They look nice once installed, and make changing strings easy. And they increased my sustain. Best \$49.95 I ever spent to improve my cheap ol' acoustic. —*mi.perez*

Definitely one of my Martin guitars. My M-36 is comfortable to play, and has great balance and a nice voice. It is hard to put a price on something that brings such great pleasure. —*dpbuff*

Music stand with clip-on LED lights (they can be battery operated or plugged in) —*cornellgoldw*

## IF YOU LOST ALL OF YOUR GUITAR STUFF, WHAT THREE SPECIFIC THINGS WOULD YOU REPLACE FIRST?

Quality acoustic guitar; quality mic stand; quality amp/PA system. —*JoshGalvinMusic*

Guitar stands; reference materials and music songbooks; picks, metronome, straps, guitar cases, humidity reader. —*iching33*

My guitar; my case; a good capo. —*bgarner30*

Snark Tuner; Blue Chip picks; chair for guitar playing. —*mando51*

My Washburn dreadnought, my Roland acoustic amp, and my heart, because it would be broken. —*pickens*

## WHAT PIECE OF GEAR IS WORTH THE SPLURGE?

The acoustic guitar itself. You get what you pay for. My philosophy is, "You buy cheap, you buy twice." Save up your money and buy the better guitar. —*Randsrudol*

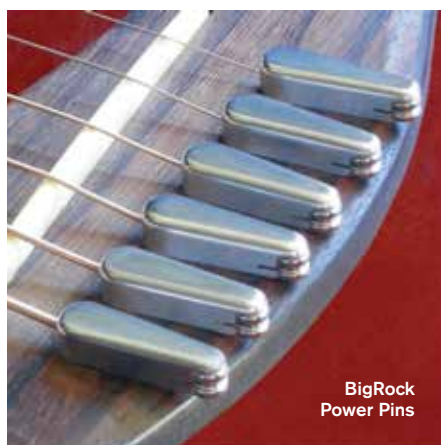
An iPad—it's my practice buddy, backup band, tuner, metronome, and Skype device for lessons. It even doubles as an amp and pedals. —*matthew.kelly55*



**Blue Chip  
TAD 40 Pick**

Wireless microphone. Gives me much more freedom than being stuck behind a wired microphone. It's expensive, but worth it. —*jwilso17*

A good pick can make your tone much fuller or brighter; don't use just any old piece of plastic. I currently use picks that cost \$4 each and wouldn't use anything else. That, in con-



**BigRock  
Power Pins**



junction with the right strings, can make or break my tone. —blairmanie

Get a decent guitar strap that's actually comfortable, adjustable, and durable, as well as aesthetically pleasing. —pryderijones

Strings! They are the vocal chords of a guitar and without them, a guitar cannot sing. —anon.

Tone Finger-Ease guitar string lubricant, \$6. Keeps my strings from rusting and allows me to slide up and down the neck with ease. —RickMyerscough

Tone Finger-Ease



#### WHAT MONEY-SAVING GEAR ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ANOTHER GUITARIST?

Pay for a good setup. This may solve some problem(s) that might lead to spending money for a different guitar. —p.d.bear6

Have patience. Ignore the hype and listen to your ears. Do your research, then take a knowledgeable friend with you to try out gear. It'll save you from a bad buy, and give you a great acquisition story for a fraction of the price. You'll never regret paying for quality. —Miguel

Ask local players for the name of a trustworthy local luthier who is willing to fix only what needs fixing. Some city shops will, for example, say you need a complete re-fret when only four frets are worn. —csweeks

When you buy a guitar, listen to the guitar—not the sales person, not the tag, not the magazine, not the maker. Play them all and take your time. —hammettbr

Don't buy a guitar without playing it first. Don't make a purchase of significant expense without going home and thinking about it so that it is not just an impulse buy. —dgbaskin49

#### HAVE A STORY ABOUT HOW YOU SCORED SOMETHING VALUABLE FOR CHEAP? TELL US MORE ...

I like to go to garage sales, and I always ask if they have a guitar for sale. More than once the reply has been, 'Oh yeah. I've got an old one in the closet that never gets played anymore.' My best score: Seagull S6 for \$60. —waffle521

One time I bought a new Martin HD-28VS (12-fret) that had been in a store for a while. As a dealer, they were required to order a new guitar from the Vintage series (once a

year or something), so they sold this one at a very good price. It is a great-sounding guitar and a prized possession. —edwrig

Paying with cash usually gets a better deal. I purchased a new Taylor 562ce from a local dealer for 15 percent less than the online prices. —anon.

I scored a year's subscription to *Acoustic Guitar*. Priceless! This is a true statement—so much valuable info and a pleasure to read. —francbridges

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HERE'S HOW

# Be Your Best Self

5 ways to overcome common mental blocks to playing guitar

BY PAULINE FRANCE

**T**o me, there is nothing more disheartening than hearing someone say, “I always wished I learned how to play guitar” or “I just don’t have enough time to play.” My immediate thought is always, “What could possibly be stopping you?”

After hearing myriad reasons from students and wishful players—those who never actually picked up the instrument but *really* wanted to—the only thing I can ask is: “Are you what’s stopping you?”

The first step in recognizing why you don’t devote enough—or any—time to guitar is asking yourself what you’re afraid of. When we make constant excuses, we’re generally protecting ourselves from something that makes us scared or gets us out of our comfort zone. For example, the idea of playing in public or being afraid of not sounding good enough can elicit excuses like, “I have no time” or “my hands are too small.”

Give those excuses some serious thought and ask yourself if they’re really legitimate. If you find that they’re not, then decide if your desire to play is real. You’ll know right then and there if you’re serious about learning guitar.

Here’s a collection of top excuses I’ve documented throughout my teaching and playing career, and suggestions from pros on how to focus your energy on actually playing—instead of coming up with reasons you can’t.

## 1 I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME

It’s not that you don’t have enough time, it’s that you don’t *make* enough time. Seattle-based Deft Digits Guitar Lessons founder Joe Walker explains, “We’re all given the same amount of time every day: 24 hours—that’s 1,440 minutes! If playing guitar is important enough to you, then you’ll only make the time by forgoing some other activity that’s less important. The extra time for guitar won’t just fall into your lap; you have to carve it out.”

Another thing you can do to make time is keep a guitar in plain sight to remind you of its existence. If you have it tucked away in a case under your bed, you’ll forget you even have one. Once it’s next to your bed instead of underneath it, be disciplined and wake up 15 minutes earlier a few days a week to get in a strum or two—one strum is better than no strum.

## 2 MY HANDS ARE TOO SMALL

Any time I hear someone say this, I respond with, “How about not having any hands at all?” Guitarists like Mark Goffeney and Tony Meléndez were born without arms, and didn’t let that stop them from mastering their instrument. (They play with their toes, in case you were wondering.) Also, there are lots of guitars in the market with smaller necks, shorter scale lengths, and more compact bodies. So yes, cross this excuse off your list.

## 3 I'M TOO OLD

I’ve said this before—guitars don’t have an expiration date, and neither do you. The only time an older student of mine had to stop playing guitar was when she was diagnosed with arthritis. Age-related medical instances like these are completely understandable, but otherwise, there’s no such thing as being too old. For inspiring examples, look up players like Bob Wood and Macel Tenney—both in their 80s!

## 4 I CAN'T AFFORD IT

Yes you can. Nowadays, good budget guitars are dirt cheap. Instead of spending five dollars a day on a fancy coffee, save it toward buying a guitar. You’ll have enough for a starter model in less than a month.

As far as lessons go, can you afford free? While I highly recommend having an instructor to guide you thorough your guitar journey, at least at the beginning, if cash is tight you can find hundreds if not thousands of free tutorials online.

## 5 IT'S TOO HARD

Wait, what? Yes, of course it’s hard. If it were easy, everyone would be a guitar virtuoso. But it’s only as hard as you believe it to be, and it generally gets less hard with the magic *p* word: practice.

“Practice makes it easier,” says Cynthia Maalouf, a guitar teacher in Beirut, Lebanon. “Also, making mistakes is part of the learning process, which is totally normal as long as you’re aware of those mistakes. Like the saying goes, if there’s a will there’s a way. You have to go for the extra mile. Once you do so, you will find how fun it is.”

Plain and simple—if you really want something, you’ll make time for it. It applies to everything in life, including guitar. You’re better off starting now rather than thinking, “If I had only learned guitar.”

As author Karen Lamb puts it, “A year from now you will wish you had started today.” What are you waiting for? **AC**





# Bourgeois

Guitars



...but the most important part isn't  
found on a materials list.

# Making Practice More Musical

Learn how to practice musically, not mechanically—no matter what you're working on

BY PAUL MEHLING

## THE PROBLEM

You're playing etudes and exercises, but you feel these are not improving your playing.

## THE SOLUTION

Find ways to understand your woodshed workout in a musical context.

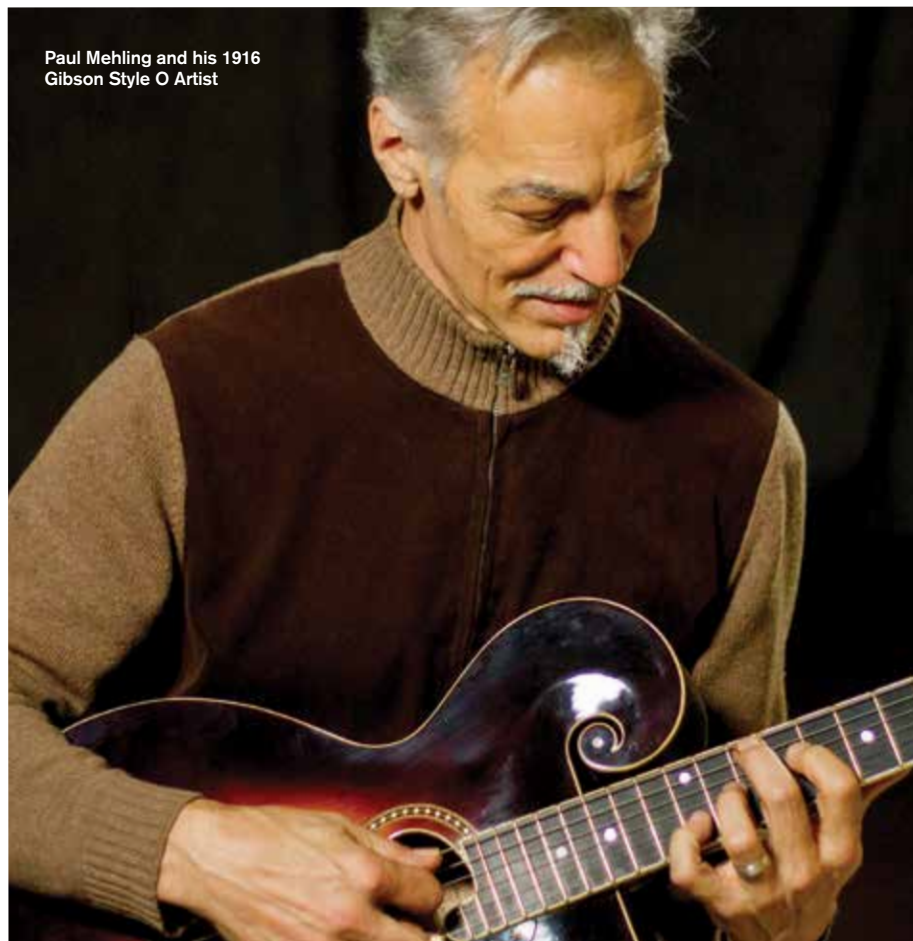
### 1 MAKE RHYTHM TRACKS

One of the most important rules of doing any exercise is to fully grasp its usefulness and/or its place in music. Start by using what you're already working on by applying some of those same techniques in a musical context. For instance, say you're woodshedding on a C major scale (C D E F G A B). You could try recording a rhythm track (see my Basics lessons in AG's August 2017 issue) of a C major chord to play against your C major scale. This may be a basic example, but if you're a beginning or even intermediate player, you might find preparing a track like **Example 1** very helpful.

If you're more advanced, you might make a rhythm track of something like a ii-V-I, that ubiquitous jazz progression, shown in the key of C major in **Example 2**. Or try a pop chord progression like I-IV-V-I (**Example 3**) or I-vi-ii-V (**Example 4**).

### 2 EMBRACE THE DIFFICULT

Another way to come at this is to create your own exercises using passages from tunes that you're currently struggling with. Classical players actually work from something called "orchestral excerpts," which are published collections of difficult passages and are literally the hardest-of-the-hard sections of major classical works. You can—and should—collect your own excerpts from tunes that have meaning for you. Working on them daily and diligently will yield great results when you plug the excerpt back into the original piece from which it was taken.



Paul Mehling and his 1916 Gibson Style O Artist

In case you've never considered this: You don't need to practice the entire song you're working on if there are only a few measures that are giving you difficulty. Just put your music under a microscope and zero in on those measures, or even just on a few notes in those measures. This way you can enlarge those bumpy spots so that you can work on smoothing everything out. And do it slowly and precisely.

### 3 BE DYNAMIC

Here's another thing you may never have considered: An ascending musical phrase naturally gets louder, because high notes are generally louder than low notes. Likewise, if you descend, the line will go from loud to soft. This loud-soft dynamic is a principle that you can use to make your playing more musical.

Try using dynamics like this in your studies: While playing a scale, emphasize the natural crescendo by exaggerating it. In **Example 5a**, play a C major scale, starting off *pianississimo* (*ppp*, meaning very, very soft), and gradually building up to *fortississimo* (*fff*; very, very loud).

Now do the opposite—play Ex. 5 starting out loud and getting softer as the scale rises—this fights the natural principle of music

(almost like defying gravity!) and will add an emotional impact to your playing if you can harness it. Plus, it's just more fun to play scales with dynamics. Advanced players might try using varying degrees of loud-to-soft and/or soft-to-loud in their scales regardless of the rise or fall, as in **Example 5b**.

### 4 PRACTICE WITH INTENTION

Another useful way to play with more musical intention is to think of your practice as a song. Take, for instance, the great instrumental "Dueling Banjos," which, with its broken thirds recalls some of Rodolphe Kreutzer's studies for violin (**Example 6**). Rather than mindlessly playing sequences like these, focus intently on the music within them.

Finding ways to hear yourself actually making music rather than merely doing rote exercises is one of the easiest ways to improve your musicianship, so why not give it a try? **AC**

Nicknamed "the Godfather of gypsy jazz in the US" by PBS, Paul "Pazzo" Mehling is the guitarist, composer, and bandleader of the Hot Club of San Francisco and a faculty member at the California Jazz Conservatory. [hotclubsf.com](http://hotclubsf.com)





### Example 1

### Example 2

Example 1: C

Example 2: Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

### Example 3

### Example 4

Example 3: C F G C

Example 4: C Am7 Dm7 G7

### Example 5a

### Example 5b

Example 5a: *ppp* *fff* *ppp* *fff* *ppp f* *p ppp* etc.

Example 5b: *ppp* *fff* *ppp f* *p ppp* etc.

### Example 6

Example 6: *ppp* *fff* *ppp f* *p ppp* etc.



OLIVIA WISE

# Memphis Minnie

The open-G stylings of an undersung fingerstyle blues artist

BY PETE MADSEN

Lizzie Douglas, a.k.a. Memphis Minnie, was born in 1897 in Algiers, Louisiana. The eldest of 13 children, she learned to play the guitar at the age of 11 and was performing on the streets of Memphis, Tennessee, by the time she was 13. From 1916 to 1920, she toured with the Ringling Brothers Circus, and then wound up back on Beale Street in Memphis.

Memphis Minnie had a breakthrough in 1929 while performing with her then-husband, Joe McCoy, at a Memphis barber shop. A Columbia records talent scout heard

the duo and invited them to New York to record. The pair, billed as Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, recorded and performed together from 1930 until 1935.

After divorcing McCoy in 1935, Memphis Minnie struck out on her own. Based in Chicago, she recorded and toured, mainly in the South. And she continued to play, and even recorded electric guitar on several tracks in the 1940s. All told, she recorded over 200 sides, including “When the Levee Breaks,” (see the arrangement on page 54), “Black Rat Swing,” and her biggest hit, “Me and My Chauffeur Blues.”

By 1957, interest in her music had begun to wane, and Memphis Minnie, at age 60, retired from music. Three years later she suffered a stroke, which confined her to a wheelchair; her health continued to decline, and she passed away in 1973 at the Jell Nursing home in Memphis.

Memphis Minnie was a masterful guitarist who played intricate fingerstyle arrangements that accompanied her strong voice. Her early recordings, released in the 1930s, represent her finest playing. In this lesson you’ll look at her playing in open-G tuning (low to high: D G D G B D), with examples based on the





Tuning: D G D G B D

### Example 1

### Example 2

Example 1 and Example 2 musical notation. Example 1 is in G7 and Example 2 is in G7. Both examples show a melody line and a bass line. Example 1 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. Example 2 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as fret numbers, accidentals, and time signatures.

### Example 3

### Example 4

Example 3 and Example 4 musical notation. Example 3 is in C7 and Example 4 is in D7. Both examples show a melody line and a bass line. Example 3 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. Example 4 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as fret numbers, accidentals, and time signatures.

### Example 5

### Example 6

Example 5 and Example 6 musical notation. Example 5 is in G7 and Example 6 is in G7. Both examples show a melody line and a bass line. Example 5 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. Example 6 includes a 3/4 time signature and a 3/4 note. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as fret numbers, accidentals, and time signatures.

### Example 7

Example 7 musical notation. Example 7 is in C7/G. The example shows a melody line and a bass line. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols such as fret numbers, accidentals, and time signatures.

Cont. on p. 44

songs “Crazy Cryin’ Blues,” “Don’t Want No Woman,” and “Wild About My Stuff.”

### “CRAZY CRYIN’ BLUES”

**Examples 1–4** are inspired by “Crazy Cryin’ Blues.” The guitar parts here reflect the anguish and urgency of the vocals. If you play along with the original recordings, use a capo at the sixth fret.

In **Example 1**, over the I chord (G7) intro, Memphis Minnie plays a stock open-G line, but in the second bar she turns the triplet line into 16th notes, which increases the urgency. Note that on the recording there is a second guitar (played by Joe McCoy) in the mix, so it can be a little hard to distinguish the bass pattern, but an alternating bass line on strings 5 and 4 sounds appropriate enough.

In later verses of “Crazy,” Memphis Minnie throws in some nice finger rolls similar to those shown in **Example 2**. The typical blues guitarist picks with the thumb and one or two fingers, but to execute the roll it’s best to use your thumb (*p*), index (*i*), middle (*m*), and ring (*a*) fingers as shown in the notation. When playing this kind of roll, your picking hand should move as if you’re turning a doorknob.

**Example 3** demonstrates a typical move to the IV chord, with strings 1–5 barred at fret 5, and a descending line on string 1. Bar the fifth fret with your first finger and use your fourth and third fingers to stop the eighth- and seventh-fret notes, respectively.

**Example 4** approximates the last three measures of “Crazy”’s 12-bar verse. Start out with a D7 chord, fingered the same way as in standard tuning, but with a slight change—the first string is open, rather than stopped at the second fret. Note how the notes on string 1 then ascend and descend through notes that include the ninth (E) and raised ninth (F/E#), adding a bit of sophistication to the proceedings.

After the D7 bar, you’ll play a very cool G-chord run: Slide with your first finger, barring the top two strings, to imply a G7 chord that morphs its way into a G triad played on strings 2 and 3, fretted with the first and second fingers, respectively. Maintain that shape as you descend chromatically down to another G played on the open G and B strings.

### “DON’T WANT NO WOMAN”

**Examples 5–8** are based on “Don’t Want No Woman,” a duet with Kansas Joe. To match

the pitch of the original recording, use a capo at the second fret. The opening line of the intro is shown in **Example 5**, which throws out a barrage of attention-grabbing double-stop triplets before settling into a more languid pattern in bar 2. This sets up the background for the first two bars of the verses, depicted in **Example 6**.

The second two bars of Ex. 6 open up the guitar part as a response to the first two-bar vocal line. You might notice some similarity between these two bars and the G phrase in Ex. 4. When you study a player’s style you will come to see these patterns and understand how his or her fingers travel the fretboard. Make note of these sections and you will gain valuable insights.

**Example 7** shows how Memphis Minnie would play the IV chord in “Don’t Want No Woman.” In this voicing, she leaves the fifth string open, playing a G in the bass. She will use a similar approach for “Wild About My Stuff,” which you’ll look at in a moment.

The last four bars of a “Don’t Want” verse are depicted in **Example 8**. Start with the same D7 chord you used in Ex. 4 and play another quick roll on beat 3 using *p-i-m-a*

Cont. from p. 43

### Example 8

Example 8 shows a guitar part for “Don’t Want No Woman” in D major, capoed at the second fret. The piece is in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The guitar part is written in standard notation with a capo at the second fret. The chords are D7, G7, and C7. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first bar, a triplet of eighth notes in the second bar, and a triplet of eighth notes in the third bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the fourth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the fifth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the sixth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the seventh bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the eighth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the ninth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the tenth bar. 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### Example 9

Example 9 shows a guitar part for “Don’t Want No Woman” in D major, capoed at the second fret. The piece is in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The guitar part is written in standard notation with a capo at the second fret. The chords are G and C7. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first bar, a triplet of eighth notes in the second bar, and a triplet of eighth notes in the third bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the fourth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the fifth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the sixth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the seventh bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the eighth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the ninth bar. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the tenth bar. 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## Example 10

## Example 11 "Minnie's G Blues"

**C7/G**

**G7**

**C7** **C7/G**

**G7**

**C7/G** **G7**

picking technique; grab the third-fret F on string 1 with your fourth finger. Play the same C7 chord with G in the bass from the previous example and finish off with a two-measure phrase on G.

Examples 9–10 are based on the hokum-style ditty “Wild About My Stuff.” This playful song, with its double-entendre lyrics, has a fun guitar accompaniment that should put a smile on your face. Capo at the first fret to match the original recording.

In Example 9, the first four bars of the verse house a melodic phrase played between frets 2 and 5. I suggest dedicating one finger to each fret—first finger on fret 2, second on fret 3, etc. This will help you navigate the phrase without too much difficulty.

Example 10 uses your old friend the C7/G chord. Start this section off with only your first and second fingers fretting strings 2 and 4, respectively. Then, place your third finger down for the chord on beat 2—which happens to look like an A minor chord in standard tuning—and then, finally, the fourth

## Memphis Minnie’s guitar playing has gone mostly underappreciated through the decades, but for many blues-inspired fingerpickers she is a crucial link in the chain of Delta blues through to Chicago blues.

finger to play the third-fret B♭ on string 3. (Alternatively, you can extend your third finger to grab that B♭.)

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Example 11 is a little piece I call “Minnie’s G Blues.” In the first bar I borrow a phrase from “Crazy Cryin’ Blues,” and create a response in the second bar borrowed from Robert Johnson’s “Terraplane Blues.” In the third measure I take the roll from “Crazy” and answer it with a simple descending run down the first string.

For the IV chord in measure 5, play the barre chord from Ex. 3 and then switch to the C7/G chord from Ex. 7, adding a third-fret D with your fourth finger on beat 2. Measures 7–9 are taken directly from “Don’t Want No Woman,” but in measure 10, to approach the IV chord from the V, I keep the F note as an echo of the previous chord. In the final two measures, return to G with a triplet-based double-stop and a single-string run that ascends from string 6 and culminates in a slide from G to the flatted seventh, F.

Memphis Minnie’s guitar playing has gone mostly underappreciated through the decades, but for many blues-inspired fingerpickers she is a crucial link in the chain of Delta blues through to Chicago blues. Now that you have some of her ideas under your fingers, go out there and show some of your stuff.

*Pete Madsen is a San Francisco Bay Area-based guitarist, author, and educator who specializes in acoustic blues, ragtime, and slide guitar. learnbluesguitarnow.com.*

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# Blues Five Ways

Using the open bass strings to play the classic 12-bar form in A

BY MARY FLOWER

What's so great about the key of A major? For blues guitarists, it's the only key where the three open bass strings—E, A, and D—happen to be the roots of the I, IV, and V chords (A7, D7, and E7, respectively). As heard in classic Delta blues tunes like Robert Johnson's "Come On in My Kitchen" and "Me and the Devil," playing the blues in A allows you to move chords or notes up the neck without having to worry about fretting the root notes. Whether you pick an alternating bass or a dead

thumb (also called a monotonic bass) pattern, this is a real plus when fingerpicking and moving out of first position.

In the following exercises, you'll find some great phrases and chord patterns that make extensive use of the dead-thumb approach. For solo players, this should let you expand the treble beyond first position while keeping the bass steady. Understand that all four weeks of study also work with alternating bass. After you've completed the workout, you should have plenty of moves to draw from whenever you play the blues in A.

C# with your first finger and the fifth-fret A with your fourth finger. In measure 2, stop the third-fret G with your second finger to form an A7 chord. You might try keeping your second finger on the G throughout the A and A7 measures; that way all you have to do to move between the A and A7 chords is lift your fourth finger from the A note.

For each D9 measure, stop the second-fret A with your second finger and the first-fret C with your first finger, lifting it to play the open B in the second half of the bar. As for the E7 chord, play the third-fret notes with either your third or fourth finger, nudging the string slightly toward the ceiling wherever you see the indication for a quarter-step bend—an essential blues move.

## Beginners' Tip #1

To keep your thumb steady, tap your foot as you strike each bass string. Now you have two parts of your body moving downward together. This should strengthen your rhythm so that typical blues syncopations will not shake your solid beat.

### WEEK ONE

Begin this week by refreshing yourself with the basic 12-bar blues form, as shown in **Example 1**. Strum the chords, or play just the bass notes on the open A, D, and E strings, for the I, IV, and V chords, respectively.

Now move on to your first pattern. In **Example 2**, measure 1 shows an open-A chord requiring a bit of a stretch. Play the second-fret

### WEEK TWO

This week, realize the power of two-note chords and see how easily they move. Can you recognize the origin of the compact chords shown in **Example 3a**? Measure 1 comes from



WEEK 1

Example 1

A<sub>7</sub> (I) D<sub>7</sub> (IV)

A<sub>7</sub> (I) E<sub>7</sub> (V) A<sub>7</sub> (I)

Example 2

A A<sub>7</sub> A A<sub>7</sub>

D<sub>9</sub> A A<sub>7</sub>

E<sub>7</sub> A A<sub>7</sub>

WEEK 2

Example 3a

A<sub>7</sub> D<sub>7</sub> E<sub>7</sub>

Example 3b

A<sub>7</sub> D<sub>7</sub> E<sub>7</sub>



## WEEKLY WORKOUT

the A7 shape, while bars 2 and 3 are derived from the D7 shape. Notice that all three shapes fall within a three-fret range.

Now try some different voicings. In measures 4–6 of **Example 3b**, you'll see a similar chordal approach at the eighth fret. Notice that the dyads (two-note chords) on strings 1 and 2 come from the moveable chord shapes D7 and A7. Also, syncopation is added here by moving the chord one fret lower on beat 4 and then back up on the "and." Referring back to Ex. 1 if needed, apply these patterns to the 12-bar format.

These simple shapes, by the way, echo the brilliant playing of Freddie Green, the late, long-time guitarist with the Count Basie Orchestra.

Green, known for his masterly, understated accompaniment work, tended to focus on three-, two-, and even one-note chords on the lower strings. Remember: less is often more.

### WEEK THREE

Now that you've become comfortable picking out bass lines with your thumb, throw a riff that is reminiscent of Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning" into the mix. **Example 4** demonstrates how one such riff works over all three chords in the 12-bar progression. Start by learning the riff, shown in the upstemmed notes of each bar, on its own. Play it by fret-

ting the second-string notes with your third finger, the third-fret G with your first finger, and the second-fret A with your second finger. Pick the notes with your index and middle fingers, and make sure the slid notes sound clear and even. After you can play the riff cleanly at a moderately fast tempo, add the open-string bass notes, and then, as before, plug the patterns into the 12-bar progression.

### WEEK FOUR

This week's challenge involves a two-note chord shape on strings 2 and 3, as shown in **Example 5**. Notice that the dyads alternate between those with notes one fret apart and

### Beginners' Tip #2

Remember the term 'dead thumb'? Actually deadening the sound is part of this technique. Use the heel of your picking hand to mute the bass strings by putting a slight pressure on them. This creates a percussive sound while letting the melody, played on the higher strings, jump out.

### Beginners' Tip #3

When delving into Example 4, learn the treble-string phrases before adding bass notes. Easy does it—nice and slow!—and concentrate on the slides and the fingering. When you put it all together, don't let the upper-string syncopations distract you from playing those steady quarter notes on the lower strings.

### Beginners' Tip #4

To tackle an example with as many different dyads as Example 5, play one shape per measure for starters, ignoring the progression as you simply learn to move the shape. Then, play a second shape where applicable, and bring everything together by adding the bass line.

### WEEK 3

#### Example 4

Example 4 is a 12-bar blues progression in A major. The top staff shows the melody with upstemmed notes. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fret numbers. Chords A7 and D7 are indicated above the staff.

### WEEK 4

#### Example 5

Example 5 is a 12-bar blues progression in A major. The top staff shows the melody with upstemmed notes. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fret numbers. Chords E7 and A7 are indicated above the staff.

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## WEEKLY WORKOUT

those at the same fret. There are a number of ways you can fret these little chords, but I prefer to keep my second finger down on the third string throughout, adding my first finger to each “slanted” chord shape (bar 1, beat 1, etc.) and my third finger to each “straight” shape (bar 1, beat 3, etc.).

This same fingering concept will guide you through the whole example. The D7 measure does venture pretty high up the neck, but with a bit of practice it should be playable on a guitar without a cutaway. Play Ex. 5 first with the chord shapes on their own, and then add the open bass notes. There’s no need to insert

these patterns in the 12-bar form, since, as you probably noticed, the example is already in that format.

*Mary Flower is an award-winning instrumentalist, writer, and teacher based in Portland, OR. [maryflower.com](http://maryflower.com).*

Cont. from p. 50

The first system shows a D7 chord (fret 13 on strings 4, 3, 2, 1) and an A7 chord (fret 8 on strings 4, 3, 2, 1). The second system shows an E7 chord (fret 5 on strings 4, 3, 2, 1) and an A7 chord (fret 8 on strings 4, 3, 2, 1). The bass line consists of open strings (0) and fretted notes (8, 7, 5, 13, 12, 10, 11, 12, 8, 7, 5, 6).

## TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Put aside your dead-thumb technique to work up a piano-style boogie-woogie pattern. In bar 1, barre strings 4 and 3 with your first finger at fret 2. Try strumming these dyads with an upstroke of your index finger, and pick all the other notes with your thumb. In the second bar, fret strings 3 and 2 with your first and third fingers, respectively. This leaves your second and fourth fingers free to add the third- and fourth-fret notes. The first half of the E7 bar is fingered the same way as the A7 bar, but on strings 6–4 rather than 5–3. Since you’re probably not on a seven-string guitar, you won’t be able to play the bass line one string lower in the second half of the measure like you did in bars 1 and 2, but you can still keep that boogie rhythm going strong.

The notation shows a piano-style boogie-woogie pattern. The treble clef staff has notes for A7, D7, and E7 chords. The bass clef staff has fret numbers for the bass line: 0, 2, 3, 4, 2, 0, 3, 4, 0, 3, 4, 0, 2, 2, 0, 3, 4, 0, 3, 4.



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Memphis Minnie

# When the Levee Breaks

Memphis Minnie plays a flood of great open-G ideas in this blues classic

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

As seen in both recent and historic weather events, the American South is prone to flooding, and plenty of songs in the blues canon reflect these harsh and often tragic conditions. A prime example is "When the Levee Breaks," inspired by the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927. The duo of Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe McCoy recorded the song in 1929, and it became best known through the recomposed electric version that the rock band Led Zeppelin released in 1971.

The notation here is informed by the original, whose bright 12-bar blues accompaniment belies the darkness of the lyrics that McCoy sings. There

are two guitars on the 1929 recording, but here I've arranged the music for one. The up-stemmed notes capture Memphis Minnie's nimble leads and fills (for a detailed look at her style, see this issue's "Woodshed," on page 42), while the down-stemmed notes flesh things out with classic alternating bass patterns.

To learn the song, first tune to open G. If you'd like to play along with the recording, clamp on a capo at the second fret, causing everything to sound in the key of A; also, tune your guitar slightly sharp.

As with any fingerstyle blues piece, pick the bass notes with your thumb or thumbpick, and

the notes on the higher strings with your index and middle fingers. Regarding your fretting hand, heads up on the C chord measures, where it's best to barre the fifth fret (the seventh, if you're using the capo) with your first finger across strings 1-5 and grab the seventh-fret A (or ninth-fret B) with your third finger.

If you listen to the original recording, you'll hear Memphis Minnie play subtle variations from verse to verse. To make the most of the arrangement given here, try to learn a few of these phrases by ear, and then go for the same improvisatory spirit when you perform the song. **AC**

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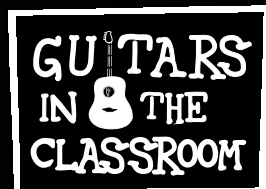
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**WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOE MCCOY**

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Rose Tree" on guitar. The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of a melody in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The melody is written in standard notation, while the bass line is written with numbers 0-5, indicating fret positions. The piece is 16 measures long, with a C chord at the beginning and a G chord later on. The bass line is written with numbers 0-5, indicating fret positions.

[illegible]

The image shows a musical score for guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chord is G7. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 0, 2, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 0. The 3rd fret is marked with a barre line.

The image shows a musical score for the song "If It Keeps" by The Beatles. It includes a guitar staff and a bass staff. The guitar staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The lyrics "1. If it keeps" are written below the bass staff. The guitar staff contains a single note (F#) in the first measure, followed by a series of chords and single notes in the subsequent measures. The bass staff contains a series of chords and single notes, with the lyrics "1. If it keeps" written below it.

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# WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS

Cont. from p. 55

**G** **G7**

— on rain - ing, lev - ee's go - in' to break. — If it keeps

2.-11. See additional lyrics

**C** **G7**

— on rain - ing, lev - ee's go - in' to break. —

**D7**

And the wa - ter gon' come — and have no place — to stay. —

**1-10** **11**

**G7** **G7**

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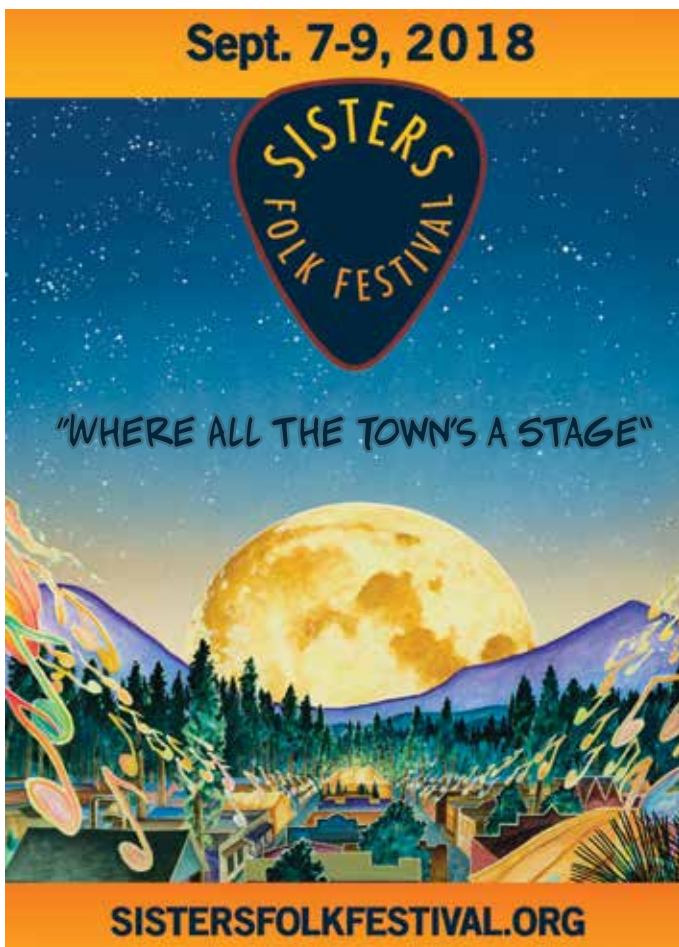
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## WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS

Cont. from p. 56

### Additional Lyrics

2. Well all last night I sat on the levee and moaned (2x)  
Thinkin' 'bout my baby and my happy home
3. If it keeps on rainin' levee's goin' to break (2x)  
And all these people have no place to stay
4. Now look here, mama, what am I to do (2x)  
I ain't got nobody to tell my troubles to
5. I works on the levee, mama, both night and day (2x)  
I ain't got nobody keep the water away
- 6., 7. *Instrumental*
8. Oh cryin' won't help you prayin' won't do no good (2x)  
When the levee breaks, mama, you got to lose
9. I works on the levee, mama, both night and day (2x)  
I works so hard to keep the water away
10. I had a woman she wouldn't do for me (2x)  
I'm goin' back to my used to be
11. Oh mean old levee cause me to weep and moan (2x)  
Gonna leave my baby and my happy home



An advertisement for Shubb. At the top, the brand name 'SHUBB' is written in large, bold, yellow letters. Below it, the tagline 'The best performers will settle for no less.' is written in a smaller font. The central part of the ad features a photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a red shirt, playing an acoustic guitar and singing into a microphone. To the right of the photo is a quote: 'Invest in a Shubb capo and it will last you a lifetime.' attributed to Steve Kaufman. At the bottom, a black box contains the contact information: 'info@shubb.com • www.shubb.com' and the phone number '707-843-4068'.



A close-up, low-angle shot of a man with long dreadlocks playing an Ovation guitar. The lighting is warm and dramatic, with a strong light source from the left creating a silhouette effect and highlighting the texture of his hair and the body of the guitar. The background is a soft, out-of-focus red and orange glow.

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Django Reinhardt

# Limehouse Blues

Learn how to play an essential Django Reinhardt solo

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It's been 65 years since Django Reinhardt died at the age of 43, but the legendary Belgian Gypsy jazz musician's recordings sound as vital as ever, and guitarists of all stripes continue to mine his work for both technical challenges and inspiration. The transcription here is a version of the jazz standard "Limehouse Blues" that Reinhardt recorded on May 4, 1936 with the Quintette du Hot Club de France, featuring Stéphane Grappelli on the violin. Taken at a swift tempo of around 280 bpm and imbued with an exuberant sense of swing, this selection is nicely representative of Reinhardt's style.

Grappelli takes the head, or melody, of the 32-bar tune arranged here for guitar in bars 1–30. (Bars 31–32 contain a swift guitar fill). Learn the melody first, as it's fairly easy, and—more important—because improvisation is all about creating variations on pre-composed melodies.

Due to space limitations, I've eliminated the rhythm guitar part, which does much to give the performance a driving feel. Paul Mehling's Basics lesson on *la pompe manouche*, the essential Gypsy-jazz rhythm, in the June 2017 issue of AG should give you the strumming

tools to create your own rhythm part, though.

It's hard to believe that Reinhardt played the blazing, acrobatic solo (bars 65–160) with just two fretting fingers. (He lost the use of his other two in a fire.) When you learn the solo, you needn't restrict yourself to two fingers—start very slowly, not greater than half speed, tackling the music one bar at a time. Be sure to notice some of the rich and odd details in the solo, such as bars 113–116, where many of the notes don't necessarily make sense from a textbook standpoint, but add vibrancy to the solo. **AG**

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## Head

Swing (♩♩=♩♩)

\* C9 A7

\*Violin arranged for guitar till bar 31.

6 G B7 Em

13 A7 D7 C9

19 A7

25 G E7 Am E7/B Am/C Cm

Cont. on p. 62



# LIMEHOUSE BLUES

Cont. from p. 61

## Violin Solo

30 **D7** **G6**

## Guitar Solo

65 **C9**

69 **A7**

73 **G** **B7** **Em**

77 **A7** **D7**

81 **C9**



# LIMEHOUSE BLUES

Cont. from p. 63

**C<sub>9</sub>** **A<sub>7</sub>**

113 *8va*

15 13/16 11/14 10/14 15/17 13/15 16 15 15 12 14-14 14 (14) 14-14

**G**

118

14-14-14-14-14-14-14-14 15 13-0 12 14-0 15 15-0 15

**E<sub>7</sub>** **A<sub>m</sub>** **E<sub>7</sub>/B** **A<sub>m</sub>/C** **C<sub>m</sub>**

122

14-15 12 13-15 13 14-13 12 14 8-10 9-10-9 7-10 9 10 8 12 14-10

**D<sub>7</sub>** **G<sub>6</sub>** **C<sub>9</sub>**

126

13-10 11 12-10 12-9 10-10 7 7 8

**A<sub>7</sub>**

131

0 4 3 0 0 4 0 12 11 9 11 7 9





136

G B7 Em

141

A7 D7

145

C9 A7

151

G E7

155

Am E7/B Am/C Cm D7

159

Violin Solo

G6 D7 G



## House of Guitars

In a Philadelphia mansion, Fred Oster curates one of the world's finest collections of vintage fretted instruments

BY NICK MILLEVOI

**T**he first time you pick up a really great 1920s or 1930s Martin, it's a life-changing experience," says Fred Oster. "I get a certain feeling about an old Martin. I might have the same feeling about a 400-year-old violin."

Oster is explaining his dedication to vintage instruments as we sit among his personal guitar collection. We're in a room tucked away on the third floor of his Victorian-era mansion on South Broad Street, in Center City Philadelphia. The 13,000-square-foot building houses his two businesses, Vintage Instruments and Frederick W. Oster Fine Violins, and contains some of the finest and oldest examples of acoustic guitars to be found in any one place.

I ask Oster which one guitar I need to play. Without pausing to think, he reaches for

a nearby case, battered with wear, and hands me a prewar Martin OM-28 that once belonged to the folk musician and folklorist Mike Seeger—the same instrument that C.F. Martin & Company recently used as the template for its OM-28 Authentic 1931 model. It's among the finest acoustic guitars I've ever played. Thanks to the well-worn edges of the fretboard, the neck fits perfectly in my hand, and every square inch of the guitar sings with each note I play.

"This guitar attests to how good Martins were," Oster says. It was made in 1931 and was played the crap out of—the fretboard is worn right through the inlays and there's no finish left on the neck. But the neck has never been reset and this bridge has never been off. The guitar doesn't have a single crack, even though it was

played for 40 years in the New Lost City Ramblers, in every imaginable condition."

Naturally, Oster doesn't stop at the OM-28. He hands me a few other guitars, including a 1942 Gibson J-45 that he says is one of the best-sounding examples he's ever heard. I concur. While much less worn than the OM-28, it has plenty of vibe, and its warm tone is undiminished as I dig in with my pick at Oster's suggestion.

"I'm strangely attached to this one," Oster says, explaining that he sold the J-45, only to have it come back to his shop a year later. I ask him if he missed it when it was gone. "Oh, yeah. You totally get into a guitar and you can easily miss it. Sometimes you don't even want to play it so much if it's a great thing. I don't want to get attached," he admits, but he obviously can't help himself.

Oster, who is 65, grew up in Philadelphia and started playing folk music and collecting guitars in high school. “Back then, you could get old guitars very cheaply. I was buying Martins out of newspaper advertisements. I was a pretty happy guy because I could see how well these mystical creatures played and how they felt,” he says.

Oster moved away in 1970 to attend a prelaw program at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, New Jersey. It was there that he expanded his musical interests to include old-time, Appalachian, and Irish music. While applying to law school, he had a sudden revelation that his true passion was for guitars. He says, “The idea that you could be around the things that you liked that much and somehow make a living was quite astounding for me.”

After a short-lived attempt at running a guitar store in North Jersey, Oster moved back to Philadelphia. He opened Vintage Instruments in January 1975, determined to specialize in only the instruments he was passionate about, despite skepticism from friends. Oster remembers, “One of my colleagues had a shop in Pittsburgh at the

**“I want customers to feel like they’re in this nice, old, quiet, safe place to try acoustic instruments.”**

**FRED OSTER**

time. I told him I was opening a guitar shop in Philly and he said, ‘What lines are you carrying?’ I didn’t know what a line was. So I said, ‘What do you mean? I’m just gonna do old stuff.’ He goes, ‘You’ll be out of business in six months.’ And I wasn’t, because I like the old stuff and it’s easier to represent. You like selling those to people. You like the experience of giving them something you feel good about. That’s what the whole shop was—and is—based on.”

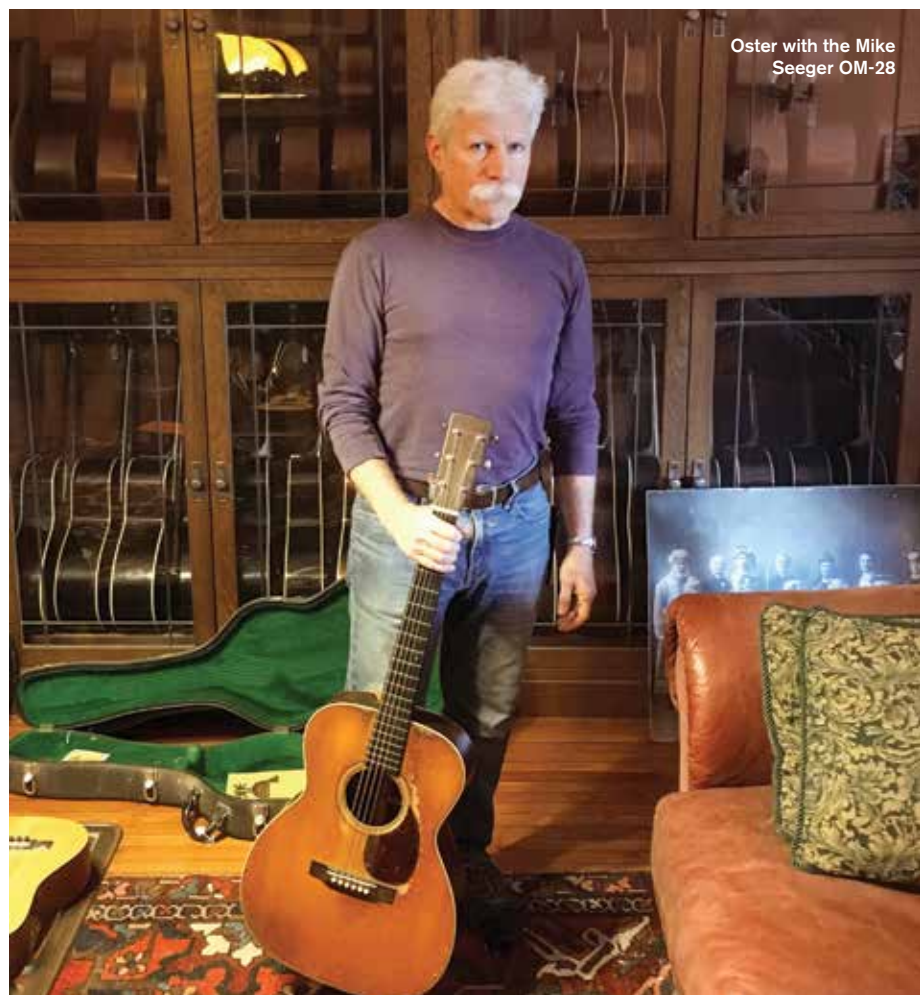
As much as he was into selling old Martins, Oster was soon struck by violins, and he found that his passion for bowed instruments equaled and sometimes even exceeded his feelings about guitars, despite his not being a player. “I branched into violins because I found them more intriguing,” he says. “It’s a study that you never quite get fully educated in. You just keep looking at them.”

By the 1980s, Oster continued to run his shop in Philadelphia, though he spent much of his time working for Christie’s in New York as the head of its musical instruments department, and part-time for the auction house in London. “Throughout the 1980s I was on the road all the time. Christie’s would send me to

different places to look at instruments, mostly violins, so I’d be in London five or six times a year for a week at a time,” Oster says, adding that he through his work with Christie’s, he joined PBS’ *Antiques Roadshow* as an appraiser.

Inside his shop, Oster’s passion and attention to detail extends to the impressive surroundings. The mansion is as grand and exquisitely detailed as the instruments that are found within: Original wood trim fills the building, golden wallpaper hangs on the

strings room, the string workshop, the reference library, the guitar room, and the banjo and mandolin room—not to mention the private collection—valuable and historic instruments abound, hanging on walls and stored in large cases and vaults. Just when I think I’ve seen everything a room has to offer, Oster will reach into a closet and pull out a case with a treasured instrument, like a 1923 Lloyd Loar–signed Gibson F-5 mandolin, or he’ll tell me that in another room he has a cistern that is the earliest known fretted



NICK MILLEVOI

walls, and a large wooden staircase at the center of the house winds up to the elegant stained glass skylight at the top of the third floor, illuminating the building. It is a fully immersive experience that Oster has created for his customers, and it is unlike any other. “I want customers to feel like they’re in this nice, old, quiet, safe place to try acoustic instruments,” he says.

The breadth and depth of Oster’s collection is hard to comprehend. As we tour the building, stopping in the violin room, the large

instrument made in the United States. And, of course, his uncanny collection of Martins dates back to the 1830s, and we visit with those throughout.

Talking with Oster about guitars, I find his passion for vintage instruments contagious. He doesn’t just love them, he wants you to know why and find something you love about them, too. Oster says, “I think you fall in love with these guitars, and you don’t lose that experience of falling in love with them. I never have, and that’s why I still do this.” **AC**



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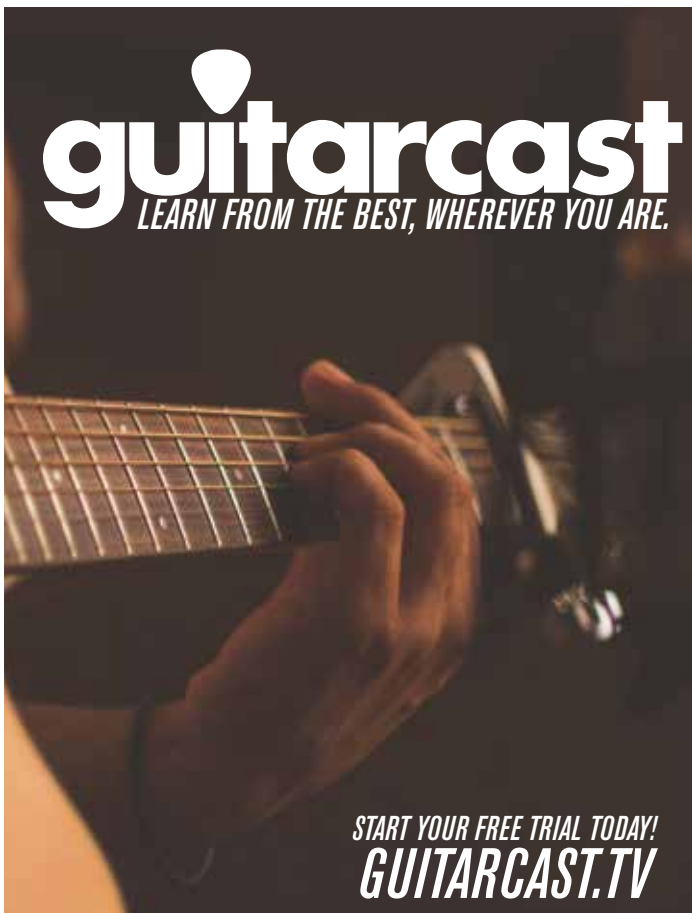
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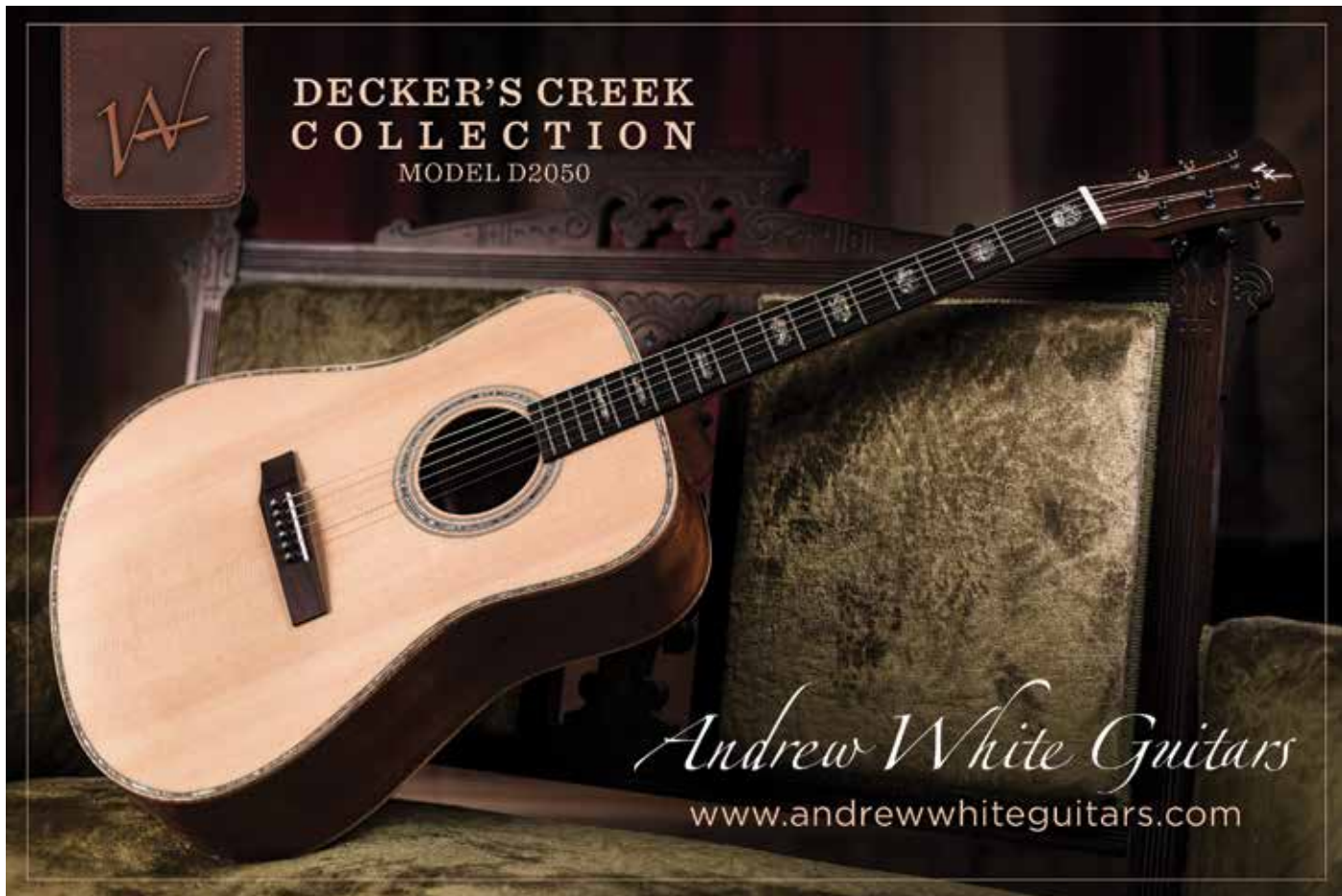
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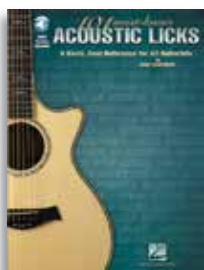
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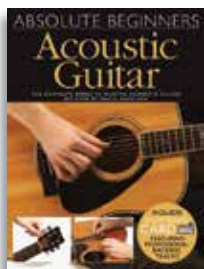
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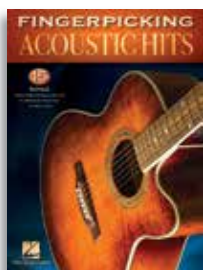


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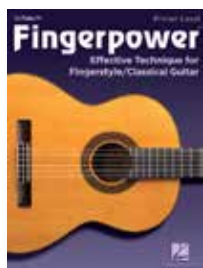


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# PRS SE TX20E and SE A50E

Well-built budget acoustics with a high-end legacy

BY BILL LEIGH

Though best known for its solidbody electrics, Paul Reed Smith Guitars has long been a builder of quality acoustics. This year PRS added six new acoustics to its SE line of instruments, which are built in Asia rather than at the company's Maryland headquarters. Though they take conceptual cues from the company's high-end domestic Private Stock series, all six are under \$1,000.

Three of the new SEs—the A20E, A40E, and A50E—are in the Angelus body style, which features a smooth Venetian cutaway for easy upper-register access. The remaining three—the TX20E, TX40E, and TX50E—have the moderately full-figured Tonare Grand body shape. All feature solid spruce tops, ebony fingerboards, bone nuts and saddles, and

Fishman GT1 electronics, with volume and tone controls neatly hidden behind the upper edge of the soundhole. Aiming for a warm, balanced tone, the A20E and TX20E have mahogany back and sides; the 40s have Ovangkol back and sides for full, lush tone; and the A50E and TX50E have back and sides of figured maple that yield a brighter sound.

PRS sent the mahogany TX20E and notably fancier figured maple A50E for review, covering both ends of the SE spectrum. The two guitars have definite similarities, as well as distinct differences. Build quality of Chinese-made acoustic guitars has steadily improved in recent years, and both of these instruments are fine examples of that evolution. From endpin to headstock, woodwork to hardware, both instruments showed

practically perfect fit and finish, and exceptional construction and attention to detail.

## TONARE GRAND TX20E

On the more conservative looking TX20E, understated black binding lines the edge between the Sitka spruce top and the coffee tones of its mahogany body, as well as along the back edge and fingerboard. Fine mahogany grain shows through the smooth gloss finish, which felt comfortable in my hands on both body and neck. PRS's signature birds-in-flight fret markers soar along the handsome ebony fretboard. Closed-back tuners sit closely but not uncomfortably on the back of the asymmetrical PRS headstock. Along the neck, the frets are perfectly seated, finished, and polished for a



## PRS SE TX20E

**BODY** Solid spruce top with X-bracing; laminated mahogany back and sides; ebony bridge; bone saddle; black and white plastic binding; gloss finish

**NECK** 25.3"-scale mahogany neck; 20-fret ebony fingerboard with bird inlays and 11.81" radius; 1-11/16"-wide bone nut; sealed gear tuners

**ELECTRONICS** Fishman GT1 **OTHER** Hardshell case **PRICE** \$599 street

**MADE IN** China



completely unfettered playing experience. Like its relative, the AX20E, the TX20E features traditional steel-string X-style bracing.

Set up in PRS's Stevensville, Maryland, factory, the TX20E arrived with moderately low action that made the instrument immensely playable across the entire fretboard. The guitar felt well balanced across the strings and up the neck, and the acoustic sound was also even with a distinct bias toward the upper midrange. Strummed chords sounded clear and warm, with pleasing overtones and crystalline resonances floating over a tight, modest low end. Fingerpicked passages revealed the instrument's sweetness and dynamic sensitivity. Single notes came through true and clear, with a bit of notable zing. There was no low-mid mud to be found; in an ensemble, the TX20E's mids and highs would cut through easily.

The Fishman GT1 pickup system combines an undersaddle transducer and a soundhole-mounted preamp, with a 9-volt battery box and output jack located about four inches south of the bottom strap button. Amplified, the TX20E manifested glimmering highs and a

bottom end that was balanced, if a bit subdued. Palm-muted chords showcased the Tonare's broad dynamic range. The overtones of strummed and plucked chords sounded heavenly with a smattering of reverb. Overall, the TX20E's sound featured its forward upper mids and radiant overtone shimmer.

#### ANGELUS A50E

Along with its cutaway-lacking cousin, the TX50E, the A50E has a more ostentatious attitude. Real abalone purfling lines the solid Sitka top and decorates the soundhole, while the avian fret markers are presented in more colorful abalone. A thin stripe of the multihued shell runs down the center of the back and bottom, bisecting waves of maple grain, and complemented with a soft burst finish on the back. The resulting visual is striking, yet tasteful; it's not overly flashy. Compared to the mahogany TX20E, the A50E's black binding stands out more against the butterscotch and auburn tones of the stained figured maple back and sides, completing the instrument's snazzy outfit. The internal structure

features the same hybrid bracing that's used in PRS's Private Stock acoustics—a combination of X-style steel-string bracing across the center and fanned classical-style bracing along the belly. Also finished in high gloss, the A50E had the same balanced, comfortable feel as the TX20E, aside from the Venetian cutaway. PRS set up the instrument with comfortably playable action, though my tester was a bit higher than the TX20E.

Sonically, the maple bodied A50E is bright and forward reaching, with a tight bottom end, an even midrange, and glittery highs. Like the TX20E, it lacks low-mid oomph, opting instead for a balanced sound with prominent highs that cut through. Strummed chords sparkled while fingerpicked passages produced luminous sonorities. Plugged in, the Fishman GT1 captured and conveyed the instrument's naturally bright character and dynamic responsiveness.

Both the PRS TX20E and A50E are exquisitely built instruments with sonic signatures that speak with clarity and resonance. At these prices, PRS's new family of SE acoustic guitars is definitely worth a try. **AG**



## PRS SE A50E

**BODY** Solid spruce top with PRS hybrid X and classical bracing; laminated maple back and sides; abalone rosette and purfling with black and white plastic binding; ebony bridge with bone saddle; gloss finish

**NECK** 25.3"-scale mahogany neck; 20-fret ebony fingerboard with bird inlays and 11.81" radius; 1-11/16"-wide bone nut; sealed gear tuners

**ELECTRONICS** Fishman GT1 **OTHER** Hardshell case **PRICE** \$899 street

**MADE IN** China

prsguitars.com

# Genzler Acoustic Array Pro

Versatile, innovative combo amp with high-fidelity sound and tasteful features

BY PETE MADSEN

As a professional musician and engineer, Jeff Genzler helped to lead the development of lightweight, very powerful amps for musicians. His previous company, Genz Benz, helped to make class-D amplifiers common among bass players, who require a lot of clean power to amplify their low frequencies. While at Genz Benz, Genzler realized that the principles of solid-state amplification that work well for bass are equally suited to acoustic guitar. This led to amps like the Shenandoah, which was a popular choice for many acoustic guitarists.

After Fender acquired Genz Benz (and mothballed the line), Genzler took a few years off from the amp biz, returning recently with his new self-named company. The Acoustic Array Pro is the company's first acoustic offering, and shows Genzler returning to innovative products with unique designs.

With its solid-state electronics and light weight (just 27 pounds), the Acoustic Array Pro shares some pedigree with those early Genz Benz amps. But the heart of this amp is a vertical speaker array of four 2-1/2-inch neodymium paper-cone drivers aligned in front of a 10-inch woofer. The woofer's job is to produce depth and warmth for the low frequencies, while the small speaker array provides clarity and authentic acoustic tones to the mid and high frequencies. It's Genzler's claim that some tweeter-outfitted amplifiers can sound harsh, so he used this arrangement to produce what he feels is a warmer, more natural sound.

## SOLID CONTRUCTION

The combo is housed in a rugged-looking, nearly square box with steel-reinforced corners and a metal speaker grille. The Acoustic Array has two channels, each with two useable inputs, which gives you the potential to plug in four different sources.

Each channel sports identical controls and two inputs—an XLR and a 1/4-inch—that can be used simultaneously for potentially two instruments and two vocalists. Each channel has a preamp volume, three-band EQ (with semi-parametric mids), and controls for dialing in the amount of reverb and chorus. Both channels also have a Contour control, which is a pre-shaped EQ curve that boosts lows and highs while cutting mids for a quick, musical EQ starting point. For instance, if you switch between a nylon-string guitar and a steel-string,

rather than adjusting all of the Genzler's EQ knobs, you can rotate the contour knob to add warmth or clarity. There is also a phase switch for helping to regulate feedback. To the right of the channel EQ controls is a small section that controls master volume, chorus, and reverb.

Gigging musicians are bound to like the upward slanted cabinet for easier stage monitoring—a feature I found especially nice in a tight space—three XLR outputs that can send your signal selected for pre- or post-EQ, and a mounting insert for placing the Acoustic Array on a stand closer to ear level. An auxiliary input for another instrument or phone/tablet/CD player is helpful for music during set breaks.

## Singer-songwriters, duos, and small combos who play in small- to medium-sized rooms should check out the Genzler Acoustic Array Pro.

### WARM BASS TONES

The 150-watt class-D amp has enough volume to fill a medium-sized room (80–100 people) and if you add an extension cabinet, the output balloons to 300 watts. The sound is impressive, especially in the lower frequencies. The Acoustic Array's bass response has range and depth that I partly attribute to its 10-inch woofer. Many acoustic guitar amps on the market favor smaller 6- or 8-inch woofers, which sacrifice a bit of that low-end bass that many people love. As a mainly blues-based player, I had to dial down the bass to accommodate my alternating bass/Merle Travis-style playing, which can sound muddy or boomy with too much low end. I also turned the contour low to minimize the swept mids and was able to get an opulent sound through my Martin OM-28V outfitted with a Fishman Ellipse pickup system. I particularly liked the sound of the Martin tuned down to open D (D A D F# A D) and hearing the rich bass tones as I picked my way through "Poor Boy Long Ways From Home."

### SIMPLER IS BETTER: EFFECTS

Rather than offer a huge palette of effects, Genzler focused the Acoustic Array on a simpler complement of reverb and chorus—

both with very silky and lush sounds. You can select the amount of reverb decay time and chorus rate and depth you want on your instrument and/or vocal in the master section of the amp and in each channel.

I enjoyed playing the AA at home, but was a little disappointed I wasn't able to try it out on a gig because of timing. I sometimes duet with an acoustic bass player, and the Array's configuration would have been perfect for our two-vocal/two-instrument setup.

Singer-songwriters, duos, and small combos who play in small- to medium-sized rooms should check out the Genzler Acoustic Array Pro. It has enough volume and high-quality sounds to make you heard, and is small enough—and light enough—to not make too big a footprint in a smaller space. **AC**

## GENZLER ACOUSTIC ARRAY PRO

**AMP** Two-channel, 150-watt class-D amp @ 8 ohms (300-watts @ 4 ohms with extension cabinet); 3-band EQ with semi-parametric mids (200Hz–5kHz); contour and phase controls; XLR and 1/4" inputs for each channel, 1/4" auxiliary input, and 1/4" effects loop; three XLR (DI) pre- and post-EQ outputs, 1/4" headphone jack; 1/4" footswitch jack, 1/4" speaker extension

**SPEAKERS** 10" woofer and four 2.5" neodymium paper-cone drivers

**OTHER** Reverb and chorus effects; stand mount; tilted cabinet; footswitch (optional); 16.75" x 15.75" x 13.75"; 27 lbs.

**PRICE** \$999 (street)

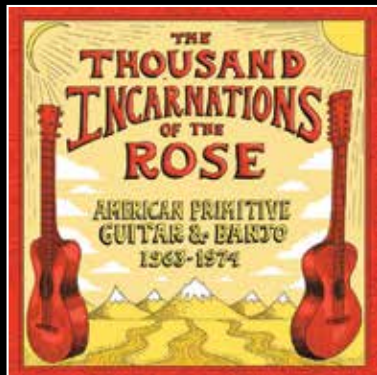
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genzleramplification.com





Genzler  
Acoustic  
Array Pro



## Various Artists

*The Thousand Incarnations  
of the Rose: American Primitive  
Guitar & Banjo 1963-1974*

(Craft/Concord)

PLAYLIST



COURTESY OF VANGUARD RECORDS

## In the Beginning...

**“Primitive Guitar & Banjo” collection is a trip back in time**

BY BLAIR JACKSON

As a teenager, I spent untold hours in my darkened basement listening to John Fahey’s spooky journeys into the unknown via “The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party” and the *Blind Joe Death* album; listened over and over with astonished disbelief to Leo Kottke’s 6- & 12-String Guitar (the “Armadillo album”); and a little later conducted my first interview in a long journalism career with none other than the incomparable Robbie Basho, whose mysterious mojo had leaped out of the grooves of his records at me and was completely overwhelming when I finally got to see him perform live.

All three of those pioneering members of my steel-string guitar Holy Trinity are represented on this excellent, wide-ranging, single-disc set of 17 pieces by ten different first-generation “American Primitive” guitarists and banjo players, spanning 1963–1974. That term itself is open to debate, but it’s come to encompass a movement of musicians who drew from “folk” sources ranging from blues to old-time country to Indian ragas, but in the service of what compilation producer (and author of the illuminating liner notes) Glenn Jones writes was about “concocting

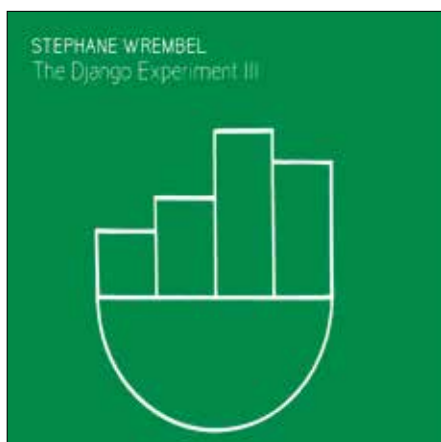
their own techniques, tunings, and aesthetic approaches in order to best say what they wanted to say.” At its best, American Primitive music was deeply personal for the players, and that’s why it connected so strongly with so many listeners (though, of course it was never more than a niche style). Jones’ collection draws from the catalogs of Fahey’s Takoma Records label and New York’s folk-music giant Vanguard Records, so he had much to choose from. And though some might quarrel with any given choice or selection (’twas ever thus with every compilation ever), overall the set offers a varied and dynamic glimpse of the movement that eventually helped spawn the more palatably mainstream “Windham Hill Sound” (Ackerman, DeGrassi, Hedges, et al), and on down the line to today’s slick fingerstyle greats. This stuff is rough and ragged in places, much of it clearly improvised, and sonically not what modern audiences perhaps expect/demand. But it’s undeniably heartfelt and soulful in a deep and occasionally even spiritual way.

Aside from the aforementioned three, the only other players here that I was aware of back

in the day were the always underrated Peter Lang (who shared a great 1974 album with Kottke and Fahey) and Sandy Bull, who I knew mostly as a guitarist, not a banjo player as he is here. Bull’s track feels like the missing link between the Primitives and the influential Harry Smith *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which in the early ’50s brought together all sorts of incredible and strange 78s from the late ’20s and early ’30 onto LPs for the first time. Others, such as Harry Taussig, Max Ochs, and Peter Walker, I’ve gotten to know only recently through important contemporary rereleases by the Tompkins Square label of little-heard ’60s and ’70s albums. Fred Gerlach was also new to me, but his 12-string guitar and vibraphone journey (self-double-tracked) has become one of my favorites. Peter Walker’s “Gypsy Song” is another that benefits from multiple instruments—in this case he plays sarod and is backed by tabla, violin, and flute; it’s one of several explicitly Indian-influenced pieces on the album.

All in all it’s a fascinating trip back to a different time and very different headspace. These “primitives” sound pretty evolved to me. **AC**





## Stephane Wrembel

*The Django Experiment III*

(Water is Life)

**Far-reaching set brings multiple styles into Django orbit**

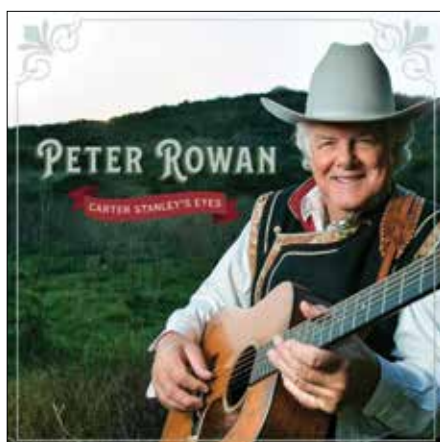
It's not that Gypsy jazz is amenable to experimentation, Stephane Wrembel seems to be saying with *Django Experiment III*. Gypsy jazz is experimentation. After all, Django Reinhardt drew on existing music to create something new.

Though this set is heavier on the *Experiment* than on the *Django* half of the equation—there are only three tunes by Django and one by his younger brother Joseph here—Wrembel and his band show they can pay straightforward tribute to the master. Like a pot simmering but never boiling over, Django's "Manoir de mes rêves" maintains a delicate tension, and the balalaika-like rattle of Wrembel's guitar and Nick Driscoll's coquettish clarinet enhance the easy swing of the much-covered "Nuages."

Elsewhere, this album illustrates Django's legacy unbound. On "Swing Gitan/Apocalypse," the warp-speed flamenco-style guitars of Wrembel and Thor Jensen spiral in ever-tightening circles. A drone like a mu'addhin's call to prayer sets the guitars on a path like a crackling current climbing a Jacob's ladder on "Les flots du Danube." On Reinhardt's "Flèche d'or," Wrembel and Jensen's rattling sweep-picking is bolstered by Driscoll's trilling and dive-bombing clarinet. The guitarists pass the bebop baton back and forth as they stray into slipknot avant-garde territory.

Throughout, Wrembel stays true to his inspiration by rejecting notions of Gypsy jazz purism. In his hands, Django's syncopated Sinti swing pulls everything from hard bop to the otherworldly squall of free jazz into its orbit.

—Pat Moran



## Peter Rowan

*Carter Stanley's Eyes*

(Rebel)

**Rowan in top form on tribute to some of his influences**

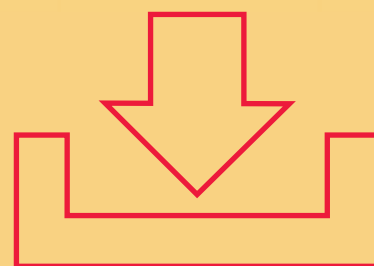
It's a flatpicking fiesta. At 18, singer, songwriter, and guitarist Peter Rowan's initiation into bluegrass heavyweights the Stanley Brothers—Carter and Ralph—arrived via an afternoon spent with Baltimore mandolinist Jack Tottle's bootleg reel-to-reel tape collection. "I was touched by the generosity of the pickers and singers and struck by Carter and Ralph's harmonies, the hardcore 'grass they gave us beginners," Rowan recalls in his liner notes to this homage to the Stanley Brothers. "I was moved by Carter's mysteriously, longing voice . . . tragic yet yearning for spiritual transcendence."

Rowan would later join Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys; he gives a nod to Carter, also a former Blue Grass Boy, on the touching original "The Light in Carter Stanley's Eyes." The mountain spirit soars on the ancient murder ballad "Hills of Roane County." On the gentle original "Take My Ashes," Rowan (ever the cosmic cowboy) contemplates death and spiritual renewal. The stunning harmonies on Carter Stanley's "Too Late to Cry" are chilling. Rowan has never sounded better as he lends plaintive, high-lonesome vocals to these 14 tracks, which include Rowan originals, spirituals, and mountain songs, as well as compositions by Monroe, the Louvin Brothers, A.P. Carter, and, of course, the Stanleys. He is backed by an all-star band that features Tim O'Brien (vocals, guitar), Chris Henry and Don Rigsby (vocals, mandolins), and Blaine Sprouse (fiddle), among others.

Rowan augments his dreadnoughts here with a 1937 Epiphone Broadway and a 1932 Epiphone archtop.

—Greg Cahill

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# 1938 Martin 000-28

A golden-era flattop,  
as clean as they come

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Coveted prewar Martins surface all the time, usually with typical tell-tale signs of age, like scars and repairs. That's what makes the 1938 000-28 that recently sold at The Music Emporium in Lexington, Massachusetts, so unusual. The guitar was in such well-preserved condition that some customers mistook it for a newly made Martin Authentic or a refinished vintage example, according to Andy Cambria, a sales associate at the shop. "It's a marvel to behold," he says.

This particular 000-28 perhaps owes its cleanness to geographical circumstances. Cambria speculates that the guitar spent most of its life in the moderate climate of Carmel, California, where it avoided the punishing effects of dry winters and humid summers. Because of this, the Brazilian rosewood back and sides and the Adirondack spruce top are entirely crack-free; the finish is devoid of crazing and, aside from a few dings, looks much like it did when it left the Martin factory 80 years ago.

The short, 24.9-inch-scale guitar has a 1-3/4-inch nut, as opposed to the 1-11/16-inch width that became standard on Martin triple-Os in 1939. Cambria says that the neck has the perfect V profile and that, thanks to a neck reset by T.J. Thompson, it plays better than most new guitars. Most important, the guitar's voice is ideal. Cambria says, "It's incredibly responsive and has a surprising amount of bass, matched by clear highs and an impressive midrange. The notes are consistent up and down the neck; it's everything you would want in an acoustic guitar."

AG



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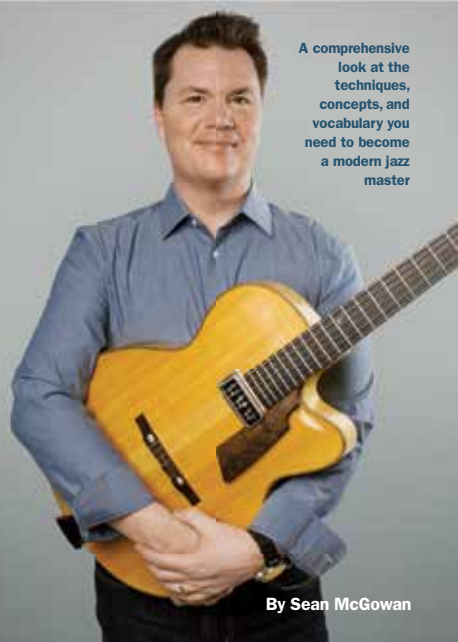
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